This is a digital copy of a book that was preserved for generations on library shelves before it was carefully scanned by Google as part of a project to make the world's books discoverable online.

It has survived long enough for the copyright to expire and the book to enter the public domain. A public domain book is one that was never subject to copyright or whose legal copyright term has expired. Whether a book is in the public domain may vary country to country. Public domain books are our gateways to the past, representing a wealth of history, culture and knowledge that's often difficult to discover.

Marks, notations and other marginalia present in the original volume will appear in this file - a reminder of this book's long journey from the publisher to a library and finally to you.

Usage guidelines

Google is proud to partner with libraries to digitize public domain materials and make them widely accessible. Public domain books belong to the public and we are merely their custodians. Nevertheless, this work is expensive, so in order to keep providing this resource, we have taken steps to prevent abuse by commercial parties, including placing technical restrictions on automated querying.

We also ask that you:

+ *Make non-commercial use of the files* We designed Google Book Search for use by individuals, and we request that you use these files for personal, non-commercial purposes.

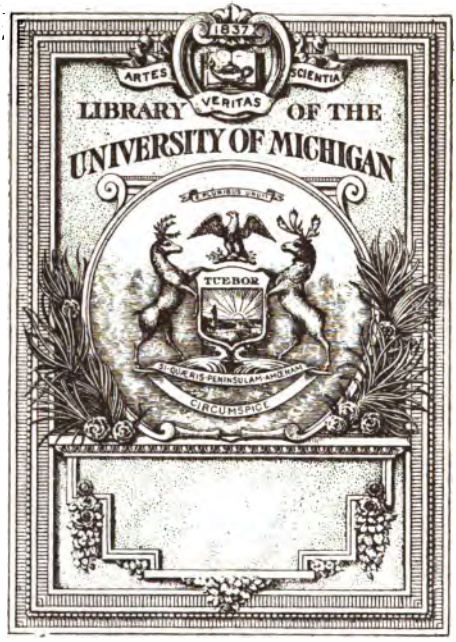
+ *Refrain from automated querying* Do not send automated queries of any sort to Google's system: If you are conducting research on machine translation, optical character recognition or other areas where access to a large amount of text is helpful, please contact us. We encourage the use of public domain materials for these purposes and may be able to help.

+ *Maintain attribution* The Google "watermark" you see on each file is essential for informing people about this project and helping them find additional materials through Google Book Search. Please do not remove it.

+ *Keep it legal* Whatever your use, remember that you are responsible for ensuring that what you are doing is legal. Do not assume that just because we believe a book is in the public domain for users in the United States, that the work is also in the public domain for users in other countries. Whether a book is still in copyright varies from country to country, and we can't offer guidance on whether any specific use of any specific book is allowed. Please do not assume that a book's appearance in Google Book Search means it can be used in any manner anywhere in the world. Copyright infringement liability can be quite severe.

About Google Book Search

Google's mission is to organize the world's information and to make it universally accessible and useful. Google Book Search helps readers discover the world's books while helping authors and publishers reach new audiences. You can search through the full text of this book on the web at `http://books.google.com/`



THE GIFT OF
Sheehan Bk. Co.

828
S9356t

THRALDOM

THRALDOM

BY

JULIAN STURGIS

AUTHOR OF

"JOHN MAIDMENT," "AN ACCOMPLISHED GENTLEMAN," ETC.

NEW YORK

D. APPLETON AND COMPANY

1887

4-16-18. M.C.

THRALDOM

CHAPTER I.

THE sun was shining brightly on a frosty morning when young Tom Fane, son of old Tom Fane, stepped gaily on his way to Goring House. The Fanes had always been hunting people, and young Tom had grumbled, as in duty bound, at the frost which hindered foxes from the performance of their stimulating duties. But the sun was so bright, the air so keen, and the good road so firm beneath his feet, that it was as hard for the young man to feel discontent with his life as to stop the blood which ran livelier in

313302

his veins. Indeed it is not given to everyone to be a boy of two-and-twenty, to have neither debts in the past nor doubts of the future, to be a good fellow and to know it, and to be happy in his first love. Generous, truthful, and sensible, this young man was happy in the possession of faults which some people liked, and almost everyone would pardon. He was over-sanguine and quick-tempered, and inclined to be intolerant of those of his contemporaries who had not been at Eton or in his set at Oxford. Tom had been at Eton and Oxford, and had passed through both educational establishments with the affection of many friends and the approval of his instructors, though neither the Thames at Eton nor the Isis at Oxford had been left in flames behind him. He was one of those well-balanced lads who set old gentlemen quoting their well-used Latin about the sound mind in the sound body, and who inspired

those words—which it is likely that the Great Duke never said—about the Eton Playing Fields and the Battle of Waterloo. He had lived in a rather narrow world, wherein all the boys, or men, wore the same sort of collars. All good things had come to him a little too easily; and finding that he succeeded without difficulty, and deciding that he was cleverer than most of his mates, he expected much, was impatient of delay, and had small doubt of the success of his love. Was he not all which even a doting parent could demand for his daughter? Active and healthy, sensible and popular, only son of old Tom Fane, who had inherited a fine property from other Tom Fanes, who had been old and young in the county before him, he swung his stick and whistled on his way, as he stepped to Goring House, where dwelt the girl of his heart, who was to be so glad of his wooing.

But young Tom Fane was not going to woo on that morning. His lips would smile of themselves, when he was not whistling, for he was on a romantic pilgrimage, and it seemed comical to him that he yielded to romance. He laughed at himself, and liked himself the better for indulgence in this sentiment. He was not ashamed of it, for after all there had been no hunting for a week past, and a man might as well walk to Goring House as sit at home doing nothing; and Sibyl was a fair enough excuse for the folly of any youth, however sensible—the flower-like maiden, so delicately cultivated, so formed by nature and by education to charm the bold confident lad, who found an unsuspected chivalry within him, and a gentler voice in her presence. He had sworn to himself, many times in many days, that he would win this girl, guard her from every possible danger and difficulty, however slight,

and always save her the trouble of deciding what she would do. He had decided already that she would accept him; he had imagined her yielding with her delicate quick blushes to his ardent prayer; he could almost feel her delicate small hands passive and at rest in his. But he was not going a-wooing on that morning; he was going to look at the house where his darling dwelt, because he wanted a walk—and why should he not go there? Perhaps he might see her in the garden path, where he had seen her first. Many possibilities were abroad on that fair frosty morning. Any way he would see her that night at the hunt ball, and then perhaps if all were well—if all things conspired to produce that perfect moment which he desired—then perhaps he would speak those moving words which would rob him of his bachelor freedom, and give him so exquisite a treasure to take care of. He

was in no hurry; his unspoken love was sweet.

In due time the valiant youth came to a well-made wall beside the road, and without delay he set his hands thereon and vaulted over to the good turf within. There was enough land within the wall to have justified the name of Goring Park, but the place had always been called Goring House, and Mr. Mervyn had been held wise by his neighbours for keeping the familiar name when he pulled down the old house and built his more imposing abode. Mr. Mervyn had come with plenty of money, to which he was still adding more in his London place of business, had built himself a good house and improved the gardens, and, changing all which needed change, had forborne to change the name. A man of admirable manner and undeniably rich, a widower who was not old, a liberal subscriber to all sorts of local institutions, admirably

hospitable without ostentation, and the father of a girl who promised to become a charming woman, Mr. Mervyn was in the best books of the best people in that side of the county. All that he did was admirable; and, if he left much undone, that too showed his sense. His neighbours had feared that the energetic man of business would make too much commotion; but he had kept his energy for the City, had shown himself a quiet man in the country, and had not even changed the old familiar name of Goring House. He was held a very sensible fellow, and he himself would have been surprised by any other verdict passed upon him by any gathering of his countrymen.

When young Tom Fane vaulted into the grounds of Goring House, he knew very well that he would alight on a spot where he could not be seen from the house. One of the small clumps of trees which the land-

scape gardener had prescribed for the place screened the adventurer from the windows, which were moreover not too near. Tom was in 'the park-like land' dear to the eloquence of auctioneers, and close at hand began the shrubberies and ingenious paths which offered cover to the intruder. Tom entered the shrubberies, took a couple of turns, and emerged in a walk which lay straight between formal evergreen hedges. At the farther end of the walk was a flight of steps, leading up to the end window of the long drawing-room. Tom went nimbly up the path to where, at its middle, the high yew hedges so far unbent as to form a fair circle around a sun-dial. There there were seats, and there was the place where young Tom Fane had seen for the first time Sibyl Mervyn. Now he laughed impatiently at his folly in expecting to see her seated there. She had been always kept in kindly air, a delicate

flower on whom no wind might blow too roughly; it was not likely that she would be sitting even in that sheltered place, when the frost still bade defiance to the sun. Yet his high colour turned a shade too red—as it was quick to turn when he was annoyed—his small nose looked even more aquiline than usual, and his chin, with the deep cleft in it, looked even more prominent. He stood so straight, and looked at the house with an air of such decision, that it seemed as if he would compel by power of will the maiden to come forth. But it was not young Tom Fane who could compel Sibyl Mervyn.

Tom had not expected to find the girl on that morning, but yet he was somewhat offended. He was one of those who expect to get things which they do not expect. He was inclined to go boldly up the path and enter the drawing-room window; but that was impossible. It was too early to call. He was

quite sure that he was not afraid of Mr. Mervyn, nor of Mrs. Vere, the silent ladylike companion, who had been added to the establishment when Sibyl in the previous spring had entered modestly the fashionable world; but it was not the thing to do; it would be bad form, and that was enough. He was about to turn away with a pout of the lips, when he saw the window, at which he had been gazing, open slowly, and through it came another young man. It seemed that it was not too early for another young man to call. Who could it be that he was thus familiar? To Tom's eyes he had the air of one who thought that the whole place belonged to him. Slowly he came down the steps from the window, paused and looked back, and then came on again slowly and looking down. He was taller than Tom, and that alone was an aggravation; he moved with a sort of lazy grace, which Tom pronounced bad style;

and, when he came nearer, Tom saw that instead of the stiff cravat, which was in favour with him and his friends, this stranger wore a soft tie of a delicate unusual colour, a bow with ends which lay outside his waistcoat. Clearly the fellow was a cad. Besides he was infernally good-looking, with a clear dark skin and a straight nose; and Tom felt himself very red in the face. He did not admire this interloper. For one thing the chap was clean-shaved, and, though at a little distance he looked like a boy, there were visible, as he drew nearer, delicate lines in his face, which made his age doubtful, and made Tom declare to himself that he looked like an actor. Now actors in the eyes of this robust young Philistine were fellows to make one laugh after dinner, when there was nothing more amusing to attend to. An actor by daylight was impossible. Tom's little aquiline nose curled as if he smelt the footlights.

The stranger walked slowly with his eyes on the ground till he was within a few feet of his critic, who stood close to the hedge, and then he looked up with a sudden start. 'A jumpy Johnny too!' said Tom to himself, encouraging his scorn of men with nerves. He looked at the other youth with his chin put forward; and the eyes of that other flickered over him for a moment as he passed. 'Sort of chap who can't look you in the face,' said Tom to himself with exultation. But it was hard to be exultant. There was a strange young man, who had come out of the house which he did not feel himself privileged to enter at such an hour, with his necktie flying and so full of thought that he had not noticed him till he had almost run against him. What was the fellow thinking about? What right had a fellow like that to think in her garden? He looked after this inopportune thinker with a scorn, which brought small

comfort. Those large brown eyes, which had passed so quickly over his, were the sort of eyes which novelists pronounce to be attractive to women. Novelists were the sort of chaps to amuse one when it was too much trouble to go to the theatre. 'Hang novelists and actors!' said young Tom, and he looked after the man, who showed such bad taste in eyes and neckties, with a livelier aversion. In much disgust he turned his straight back on the house and walked proudly down the path behind the other young man.

When the stranger reached the end of the path he glanced back quickly, just noted Tom following, and so turned into another little walk. Tom with a careless air followed in the same direction, and was in time to see the intruder stop at a door in the wall. Tom had noticed this door in one of his former visits to the place, and had noticed too that it had the set look of a door which is never opened.

Now however the gravel had been smoothed before it, and a streak of light lay under it; and the graceful youth unlocking it with a key, which he took from his pocket, opened it without difficulty. Without even another glance at Tom he passed through the door and shut and locked it behind him. Truly this exasperating person was behaving as if the place belonged to him. Tom stood staring, bit his red lip and tugged the small moustache which lay light above it. Hearing a noise at his elbow, he turned and found a young gardener, who made haste to get rid of his grin.

'Who is that—that gentleman?' asked Tom imperiously.

'It's Mr. de Courcy, sir,' said the man.

Tom snorted with scorn of a name so fantastical. 'And who is Mr. de Courcy?' he asked.

'He has taken the Cottage, sir.'

'What cottage? I didn't know there was a cottage.' He spoke as if a cottage had no right to be without his permission.

'It has always belonged to the place, sir,' said the gardener; 'but it has been empty since Mr. Mervyn came.'

'And Mr. Mervyn has let it to this——' Tom did not finish his sentence. 'Good day!' he said briefly and turned away.

He was much aggrieved. Why did Mr. Mervyn let his cottage? That was the worst of these rich men. They never can resist the chance of making another penny. There was something unworthy in a great man of business pocketing the absurd rent of this unnecessary cottage. He ought to have pulled it down and thrown its ridiculous garden into the grounds of Goring House. That was what a born country gentleman would have done; and, if an organ-grinder out of work had come sneaking about the place, he would

have kicked him back to the other de Courcys. Such were the thoughts of young Tom Fane, maligning the respectable class of British landowners, who in these days at least are slow to kick the would-be tenant.

All the elasticity had gone out of that frosty day. Tom walked home as straight in the back as ever, but he cursed the frost with real feeling. If there were a thaw this de Courcy might trust himself outside of a horse, and so fall on his head. He tried to comfort himself by asserting that de Courcy had gone up to the house at that unusual hour on business, as a tenant and not as a friend; but the fellow had come stepping out of the drawing-room window in a most informal manner, sauntering as if he were at home; and besides as a tenant he was doubly objectionable, with a daily excuse for a visit, and with a key—confound him!—of his own. And he had soft brown eyes too—so cursedly un-English; and

even the lines on his face were interesting to women, as Tom supposed. He was the sort of fellow who looked as if he had a history; if he had a history, Tom was sure that it was discreditable. Young Tom Fane was at home in time for luncheon, and his appetite gave no cause for uneasiness; but when old Tom Fane grumbled again at the frost in a comfortable matter-of-course way, his son surprised him by cursing it with conviction.

CHAPTER II.

On the evening of the same day on which young Fane saw the ill-omened stranger walking at ease in the garden, Goring House was aroused to life and to brilliancy by the arrival of a merry party. Mr. Mervyn had never doubted that it was the right thing to fill his fine new house for the hunt ball, and to Sibyl, who had not danced since the last July, the coming of her friends was as the prologue of a happy play. She meant to be so happy on that night; and, if she never doubted that she was fancy free, yet it was no small part of the pleasure, which was to be, that Mr. Fane would wish to dance with her, and that he danced so well. A world of

flowers and music, in which she had not moved for long months past, was about to open again for her, and, when she had entered in, there she would find a young prince with close-cropped curly hair. A lifetime and a love-time were before her, and a thousand happy chances which would be spoiled by an attempt at definition. She saw herself in the new gown, which she had tried on and found becoming, moving at ease in a delightful atmosphere, approved and approving, gracious to all attentive youth, and perhaps a little kinder to one. She made up her mind to be less shy than she had been in London. When she stood by her father and received his guests, and when she poured out tea for them, she was so quietly gay and so pleasantly calm that all the new comers felt that they had done no justice to her charm, and that the country had done wonders for her looks. Her girl friends

kissed her with more zeal; the young men prepared to fall in love with her for one evening at least, and the chaperons opened their eyes at Mr. Mervyn signifying surprise and congratulation.

At dinner the merry party was more merry. They were all young, for even the mothers belonged to that new order of mothers, who, with slim figures and little curly wigs, chat more gaily than their daughters and dance more lightly. By some old-fashioned people they would have been condemned as noisy and, when severe words were in the air, as vulgar; but they were all dear friends and were people—well, if they were vulgar, then it is the thing to be vulgar and no more need be said. As it was a girls' party, the talk was decorous enough; and Mr. Mervyn, presiding with effect and unbending to exactly the right degree, kept a check on the unceasing badinage while he

did not chill the enthusiasm. More than once however the master of the house looked at his daughter with surprise. He had never seen her so excited. Sibyl seemed a different girl since she had helped him to receive these people a few hours ago. She flushed and paled; she spoke fast and eagerly and fell abruptly into silence; she seemed to her parent's moderating eye unduly excited, almost giddy—too like a flighty girl. Mr. Mervyn saw that nobody else was criticising his animated daughter, but that, on the contrary, she was winning more and more admiring glances and lively answers; and so he smiled with toleration and some superiority, and assumed the look of the proud father of a brilliant being. Was this his shy Sibyl? How quickly home-kept girls develop in the social air! He was glad that she would have a quiet time before the next London season; and meanwhile it was pleasant for a success-

ful man to feel himself the father of a successful child. He too thought of young Tom Fane, and that he would see Sibyl that evening more pretty than ever before and the object of more general admiration. He had no wish that his child should be married yet, but, as prudent fathers will, he had made inquiries about the young man, and had heard of many facts in his favour. When Mr. Mervyn opened the dining-room door for the ladies, he gave the hand of Sibyl, as she passed him, a little pressure which was intended to suggest moderation; but he was surprised at the girl's start. He really feared that she was nervous and over-excited. When the carriages were at the door, and the guests were all collected again before the fire in the big square hall, Sibyl did not appear.

Sibyl was ready but she could not come. A strange thing held her. She had left her

room and walked quickly down the passage; but, as she came, her steps had moved more and more slowly, until at last she stood still. Now she was standing still in the dim passage, not many yards from the head of the stairs which led down into the bright comfortable hall. She could just see the firelight in the hall but not the fire; and of the people laughing and talking before the fire she could see nothing but the end of a light ball gown, which moved in sympathy with the vivacious wearer. They were laughing and talking there close to her, but she could not reach them; the girls there were girls like her, but something kept her from them. It was incredible that this strange experience should be hers. She would go to her friends, but something stopped her. She put out her hands and pushed as if a barrier were before her. There was no barrier, for close before her she could see the familiar staircase and

the firelight in the hall below, and the movement of her friend's gown. It was nothing, but it stopped her; she pushed against it and it stopped her; it was nothing, but it was cold or she was turning to ice. Was it she who felt this weakness and this fear? It could not be that this was happening to her, who had been so happy all her life, and loved and guarded so well; it could not be that it was she who felt this horror creeping over her there, in her own passage, close to her own friends and to her own father. She tried to call; but she knew that nobody heard her, for they laughed and talked without a pause. Would they stand there waiting all these hours, and not wonder why she did not come? She thought that she had been for hours standing there. She would go to them; she struggled as if she were drowning; she tried to call, and she could make no sound; she was one horror from

head to heel. With a last effort she tried to toss her bouquet down into the hall; it fell on her own foot, which was put forward as she tried to move.

Then she heard some one speak. 'Where is Sibyl?' one of the girls said; 'how long she takes to decorate! Mr. Mervyn, may I run up and look for her?'

It was like a chance for life; in a moment the girl might run upstairs and find her. Would she never come? Would her father never answer? At last she heard the voice of her father—of her own father—speaking lightly in answer, as if there were nothing the matter. She knew so well the smile which went with that grave pleasantry.

'My experience is,' he said, 'that it is not good policy to hurry a lady at her toilette. The more you hurry her the longer she is.' He ended with his polite laugh, and his guests, who were in a holiday humour, laughed easily

in answer. Only the commonplace words fell like blows on his child's young head; they seemed to take an hour to say, to banish her for ever from father and friends and light.

She tried again to cry, but her bloodless lips opened and gave no sound: she tried again to move, and fell senseless to the floor.

At the sound of Sibyl's fall a door in the passage opened, and her companion, Mrs. Vere, came softly and quickly through. Always self-possessed and ready for any emergency, she wasted no time in useless cries; but going quickly to the fallen child she knelt by her side and laid her hand lightly, first on her heart and then on her forehead. Then she rose to her feet and called softly to Mr. Mervyn. 'There is no cause for fear,' she said, as he came running up the stairs; 'she has fainted.'

Mr. Mervyn thanked her with a look. He had formed a very high opinion of his daughter's companion; and he now obeyed her

instructions and helped to carry his child to her room and to lay her flat on the bed. 'I noticed,' he said, 'that she was excited at dinner. I wish that you had not refused to dine with us. They were rather noisy, and you would have been a moderating influence.'

'I am not fit for so gay a society,' said Mrs. Vere softly, shaking her head. She busied herself about the poor girl with an admirable mixture of quiet and skill; and it was not long before, under her restoring influence, Sibyl opened her great eyes. She was very pale and had no wish to move. She was very tired, and she lay still under the soothing fingers of her companion. It was clear that she could not go to the ball. Mr. Mervyn wished to stay at home; but Mrs. Vere, assuring him that there was no cause for fear, suggested with becoming deference that his absence would make the indisposition seem so much more serious than it was. He once more

admired her good sense and descended to the hall, where his guests were now full of anxiety. They were all eloquent of regret, and one impulsive maiden even begged to be left with her dear Sibyl. It was decreed however that all must go; presently all were packed into the carriages, and the girl lying motionless on her bed upstairs heard the wheels roll away into the night.

CHAPTER III.

After all Tom Fane was a healthy, happy boy, though he was of an age when the accusation of boyhood is often distasteful. His sanguine nature was not long to be denied, and if he was out of temper at luncheon, he was full of hope before dinner-time, and absolutely confident when he had donned his white waistcoat and the cheerful coat with the hunt buttons. He walked on air again, ruddy and scornful of pale faces, blue-eyed and careless of languishing brown glances. He said to himself that one look of his dear love (for his she would be, though in her modesty she knew it not) would banish from his mind all shade of suspicion, all unquiet thoughts. One look of her sweet face would prove beyond all

mathematical certainty that she was still the same, and that no graceful being had come drooping between them. He snapped his fingers at the mysterious ruminating youth before he drew on his new kid gloves. He felt sure that he would win and wear the gentle yielding maiden—that, as he told himself, a look would show that it was all right.

He went early to the ball, and impatiently awaited the party from Goring House. He thought that Mr. Mervyn, who had a liking for punctuality, would bring his guests among the first; and he began to fidget not a little as party after party entered the great ball-room. Dancing began with gaiety and zeal; the music, the floor, and the lights were all above criticism; but Tom could bestow but vague smiles and nods in answer to the greetings and pleasantries of his many friends. He did not dance, but only beat the floor impatiently. At last they came. High in the

crowd he saw the benignant sensible countenance of Mr. Mervyn, and he pushed his way towards it; he hurried to engage Miss Mervyn for the next dance, but, when he came with entreaty on his lips, he did not find her. There were other girls who had come from Goring House, but what were they? He bowed and engaged himself for dances, as Mr. Mervyn genially presented him, but he did not know if his future partners were dark or fair or their gowns fresh or crumpled. He only wanted to ask about her. Where was she? Why was she not here? Never was a loyal young man so hardly treated. At the first chance he demanded from Mr. Mervyn the whereabouts of his daughter.

'Ah, poor child!' said the father, who spoke with the most provoking deliberation. 'Poor child! she has been looking forward so eagerly to the ball!'

'But why hasn't she come? What's the matter? She isn't ill?'

'A faint turn, a faint turn,' said Mr. Mervyn looking about the room.

'And she was too ill to come! She must be very bad then? What is it?'

'My dear boy,' said Mr. Mervyn, bringing his eyes back to Tom's excited face, 'if Sibyl were seriously ill, do you think that I should be here?'

'No, of course not; I beg your pardon. I was anxious to know.'

'You are very good,' said Mr. Mervyn with a rather superior and over-intelligent smile.

Tom flushed and bit his lip. After a minute he said with assumed carelessness, 'And your new tenant? Is he here?'

'My tenant? Oh yes, of course—you mean de Courcy, our new excitement, le beau Gabriel.' He laughed and looked round the

room again; his height enabled him to take a more extended view than his neighbours. 'I don't see him,' he said; 'I am surprised, for I advised him to come and to make the acquaintance of some people.'

Mr. Mervyn was always surprised when people did not take his advice.

'Who is he?' asked Tom.

Mr. Mervyn smiled. 'Upon my word,' he said, 'I must plead ignorance. He seems a charming young fellow.'

'And you don't know who he is or where he came from?' asked Tom with ill-concealed irritation.

'He brought a letter from Courtland.' A letter from a respectable man, who was moreover a peer, seemed enough to Mr. Mervyn.

'But what does he want here?' asked Tom.

'Really,' said the other, 'that is a matter with which I do not concern myself. He

wanted the Cottage, and I have let it to him. For the rest——,' and Mr. Mervyn completed his sentence by a graceful waving of the right hand.

'Has he taken the place for long?' asked Tom again.

'No; it's a short lease,' answered the other, with the air of a man who had been asked too many questions. 'You seem to take a great interest in our young friend,' he added presently, as Tom did not move away.

'Not a bit,' said Tom shortly, and departed.

Mr. Mervyn looked after him with a smile. He did not wish to estrange this eligible young man, but he thought that a touch of jealousy would be no bad thing. He looked after Mr. Fane as if he understood him thoroughly. He considered himself a great judge of character.

Tom looked everywhere — in ball-room

and supper-room, on stairs and in passages—but nowhere did he find the young man who had made so unusual an impression on him. The moody thoughts, which he had banished, came back to him and brought a keener anxiety. He was haunted by the belief that this unwelcome new-comer had known that Sibyl would not come to the ball. This was the advantage of living close at hand, and prowling about the house and grounds. This was just the sort of fellow who would have a spy in the house. The idea was exquisitely disagreeable. That this girl, so unsuspicious of all ill, should be watched by some prying disrespectful maidservant! This de Courcy was altogether repugnant; at the first glance he had seemed to Tom uncanny; he had made him creep. 'Le beau Gabriel,' quotha! The fellow ought to be shot. Tom's red blood tingled at the thought of his sallow rival; he was in a fever of annoyance.

Neither by dancing nor by standing still and despising the dancers could he free himself for long from the tormenting idea that de Courcy had foreseen, and was now laughing at, his cruel disappointment.

Tom would not go home; he was too young not to shrink from drawing attention to his sad state. He danced and supped, but his air of enjoyment was too feverish; he felt no pleasure, and it is likely that he caused but little. Mr. Mervyn, observing him now and then with the toleration of a man of the world, was not displeased with the symptoms of disquiet. The young man was more in love than he had thought, and, when time had given him a little more patience and a more reposeful manner, he would make an excellent husband. As he was going away he laid his hand kindly on Tom's shoulder and asked him to dine with him on the next evening. Tom started,

blushed, and accepted with promptitude. 'It's awfully good of you to ask me,' he said.

'The kindness will be yours,' said the other. 'Some of our friends will be with us still, and young men are a luxury in these days. There will be no party.'

Tom declared with the ring of truth in his voice that he was glad that there would be no party; and for the next eighteen hours or so he lived upon the anticipations of the dinner. He elaborately prepared himself for the possibility that Miss Mervyn would not be well enough to dine with them, but, at the worst, he pictured her on the sofa after dinner; he asked no more of capricious Fortune than that he should see his love, and see in her sweet eyes that she was unchanged.

CHAPTER IV.

WHEN on the next evening Tom entered the drawing-room of Goring House, he thought that things would be more agreeable than he had dared to hope. The room looked friendly and familiar; only a few of the people who had come for the ball had stayed, and a final sign of the informality of the gathering was the presence of Mrs. Vere, who could never be persuaded to be present at a dinner-party. And by the side of Mrs. Vere, only a shade fairer than usual, sweet as ever in her young lover's eyes, was Sibyl. Tom, as he took her hand and asked about her health, felt confidence grow great within him, as the pale cheek showed a faint rose beneath his gaze.

He was always too ready to beat the drums of the conqueror, and to plant his banner on the walls. He had hardly left the little hand when he saw the faint rose deepen on his lady's cheek as the butler announced the entrance of Mr. de Courcy. Tom kicked a hole in all his drums and stuffed the flag of victory into his pocket, and all the glad confidence went down into his patent-leather boots, as his host presented him to their new neighbour.

De Courcy was in his gayest mood, which Tom condemned as hopelessly bad form. Indeed Tom found several marks of ill-breeding in his new acquaintance, who was over-respectful (bowing and grinning like an organ-grinder, as Tom thought) to their host, and barely civil to Mrs. Vere, because forsooth she was only a dependent. It must be confessed that Mrs. Vere herself showed no consciousness of any slight, and that all the

rest of the party seemed to feel a lively interest in this handsome, foreign-looking, agreeable person. At dinner he talked a great deal—a great deal too much, in Tom's opinion, and a great deal too much about himself. Tom wondered how people could endure such a conceited grinning ass, and for his part found him much less pleasant as a gay chatterer than as the moody lounger of two days ago. It is certain that de Courcy did talk about himself, but there was something winning (or it seemed to win his hearers) in a frankness like that of a child. When the ladies had gone he became more confidential. He spoke of himself as a person of mixed race, though a British subject. 'I am a Creole,' he said—'but you must not be alarmed. To be a Creole is not to be half a monkey nor even half a nigger—it is only to have been born in the West Indies. I am a little Spanish, a little French, a little Irish I

believe, but I entirely deny the negro. You may even examine my finger-nails.' Laughing he held out his hands to Tom Fane, who turned red. 'Ah! do not doubt me,' he added humorously; 'I am as loyal a subject as yourself.'

To Tom it seemed that there might be a double meaning in this declaration of a loyalty equal to his own; he hated the fellow's smile as he made it; he vowed in silence that he would defend his Sibyl from the loyalty of this aggressive person.

In the drawing-room de Courcy still talked the most, and still of himself. He seemed to wish to take all his new friends into his confidence; he had the air of taking them all to his heart with nice gradations of reverence. If he distinguished Sibyl from the rest, it was by a greater gentleness, as to one who was not strong. Sibyl had been persuaded to lie on the sofa, and Tom saw

with horror that there was interest in her eyes, as they went back again and again to the young stranger who talked with so much ease and charm. He spoke of himself as a painter, and said that it was this business which had brought him to England.

'I fear that the reason is not flattering,' he said. 'Here, in England, you have no rich colour; the humble painter dares to compete with your natural hues. Where I was born, one lives—one dare not copy.'

'Is it so beautiful?' murmured Sibyl. Tom chafed at the interest in her tone. She had scarcely looked at him; and he had been unable to approach her sofa, for on one side of it were two devoted girl-friends, and on the other the attentive unobtrusive Mrs. Vere.

'Is it so beautiful?' asked Sibyl softly.

'One does not look for beauty there,' answered the charming Gabriel; 'one lives

on it, as on the air. Till one can paint with liquid jewels, and fix the light of heaven on one's canvas, a man does better to copy the greys and greens of England.'

'I understand,' said Mr. Mervyn, 'that admirable work is being done by the English artists.'

'Oh, but one must learn in Paris,' cried de Courcy; 'to learn in Paris, and to paint in England—that's the way.'

'You surprise me very much,' said Mr. Mervyn.

'But tell us more about the tropics,' said one of the girls; 'and of all the flowers there.'

De Courcy laughed and showed his white teeth. He denied any scientific knowledge, but ran through some dozen names of gorgeous plants, which some of his hearers knew by sight in hot-houses. He spoke lightly enough, but, as he spoke, he seemed to grow

warmer, as if a vision came to him of the splendour and the sunshine which he loved. 'The very rocks,' he said, 'will not be bare, but crumble into soil and clothe themselves with green, till the mountain-tops are thick with waving trees—and such trees! For miles and miles the virgin forest spreads, all higher than your English trees, and, high above the forest, giant palms rear their dark heads against a sky which burns with blue. Under the endless screen you ride on a track half choked with the luxuriant growth of flowering shrubs, and hung about with streamers and great ropes of floating foliage; and then perhaps, high up at the summit of a mountain pass, you come out on a clear place, and see from your very feet tree-tops below tree-tops, great billows of living green, rolling downward to the deep blue sea fringed with a bright white line of breaking foam; and great parrots fly out of the green below

you, and wheel, shining in the sun, against the blue of the sky. Oh, you can have no idea of the sun and of the splendour! Cold and hunger are as an old wife's tale to frighten negro babes—they cannot be imagined there.'

'And you have seen all this?' said one of the girls; and Sibyl, though she did not speak, breathed a deeper breath before he answered.

'A thousand times,' he said laughing; 'I have been steeped in it—it is in my blood; I have so much stored sunshine in me that I can stand even your English summer without a shiver. I only wish I could give you the faintest idea of the radiance of it all. Why, I have lain for hours off the coast in my canoe, and glowed with all the changes of the mountain-side, as the light air moved over it—every shade of green, and here and there a wide mass of crimson or of golden flowers spread like a veil among the tree-tops. And

the blue haze—but I can never make you know what that glowing liquid blue is. It all sounds so tawdry as I speak of it.'

He finished with an impatient gesture and an apology for talking too much; but no apology seemed necessary—except to young Tom Fane.

'It must be a perfect Paradise,' said one of the girls.

'Doubtless,' said Mr. Mervyn, 'like all other places, it has its drawbacks as a residence?'

'Indeed it has,' assented the young man, turning with quick agreement to his friend: 'why, you may fall asleep under a wide blossoming tree, and wake, faint and sick, to find a hole in your foot, where a vampire has sucked your blood.'

'Ah!' cried a girl with a pretty shudder, 'a vampire!'

'Oh, yes; and you ride beneath the gor-

geous canopy of towering trees, through floating streamers and festoons of flowers, and suddenly, silently from a bough above you drops the fer-de-lance.'

'Oh, good heavens! What's that?'

'That is a hideous snake, whom the devil brought there for our sins, and who lies still and straight upon the bough, till you ride by, and then he kills your horse—or you perhaps.'

'Oh!'

'Or hot and tired of riding, you dismount to bathe in the clear brook which has made your path through the dense scented undergrowth, and as you swim in the cool refreshing water you feel a hundred tiny reptiles fasten on you, and the stream is red with your blood.'

The other girls exclaimed again at this vivid picture; but Tom, with keen annoyance in his soul, saw that Sibyl was too deeply moved for speech. She had turned

whiter, and even her parted lips had lost their colour.

'Or you are dreaming on a dream-island in a noontide sea, when a stone falls near you, and you start and look to see what playful friend assails you; and it is the island itself which pelts you in its play; the huge volcano, reared out of the listening ocean, is throwing stones at you, and you must run for your life, while the whole heaven grows black, and the lava streams rush down. Or you wake in your bed at night and feel the floor rock under you like a ship at sea, and hear the crash of houses. Yes, there are drawbacks to the life—and, above all, there is Obeah.'

Mrs. Vere, who had been watching Sibyl, now turned impatiently towards Mr. Mervyn. 'I think that Sibyl has heard enough of these dreadful things,' she said with more decision than her usual manner showed.

'Oh, no, no, no,' said Sibyl, into whose

cheek the blood came back in an instant. 'What is it? What is Obeah?'

Mr. Mervyn glanced from his daughter to Mrs. Vere, and slightly shrugged his shoulders with the air of the amiable parent who can refuse his spoilt child nothing. The lady seemed to acquiesce, though she looked again with a mute warning at Mr. de Courcy. De Courcy, for his part, was visibly excited; his eyes were shining more brightly than Sibyl's own; he laughed a short nervous laugh, avoided Mrs. Vere's warning eyes, and hurried on.

'What is Obeah?' he said. 'It is a secret of the black men—a power which none but negroes can use, and only a few of them. It was learned and used in Africa when Europe was all ice. The Obeah-man will hang a bottle at your door, and you laugh as you find in it poison of a toad, and a spider, and a rusty nail, and such great matters—but you wither and

pine for all your laughing. The Obeah-man drops harmless leaves into your cooking-pot, and you swell and die. My nurse is an Obeah-woman.'

'Your nurse?' cried one of the girls.

'Oh, I forgot, you do not know my nurse. You must come and see her at the Cottage—all of you. She is a gigantic negress, stronger than two strong men; and she loves me, and never leaves me. Her mother was two hundred years old, and was chief of Obeah-men. Oh yes, you must come and see my nurse, and she will show you her finger-nail, sharp as a knife-point, and under it a drop of snake-poison.'

A sharp exclamation broke from Mrs. Vere, and she leaned over Sibyl and raised her in her arms. She had fainted. Everybody was disturbed in a moment.

'See what you've done!' cried out Tom angrily to de Courcy.

De Courcy did not answer; he was in despair. The whole look of the man had changed in a moment. He had been hurrying on with much excitement, brilliant and with quick gestures, like a mutinous excited child; now his dark skin was sallow, his lower lip fell, his look was all dismay. He turned with dumb appeal to Mr. Mervyn, who felt sorry for him.

'My dear fellow,' he said, 'you are not to blame. My girl has not quite recovered from her turn of last night. And see! she is opening her eyes. She is all right again.'

'I shall never forgive myself,' cried de Courcy. He shrank back, that the girl might not see him, and watched her with an extraordinary grief in his face, as she was helped from the room by Mrs. Vere and the most devoted of her girl-friends.

CHAPTER V.

AFTER his disappointing dinner at Goring House young Tom Fane expected one of those restless uneasy nights which were proper to his unhappy state. The occasional reading of fiction had taught him what to expect, though he had never known a bad night in his life; and even now the new experience was denied to him. He tossed about for a few minutes, and found a little unacknowledged pleasure in the midst of his discomfort, for he was doing the right thing; but all too soon youth and health had their way, and he fell into a deep sleep. With the morning he awoke more valiant, and the untoward events of the last evening looked less serious. He reviewed

again his little store of nothings, which had made him sure that Sibyl distinguished him from his fellows. They were trivial enough, but from a girl like Sibyl they meant so much. Was he to forget these precious moments, which memory held so dear, because his love, yet weak from last night's fainting-fit, had been affected by this sallow nervous fellow with his stock of travellers' tales? He, Tom Fane, was not to be beaten by a man like that; he would be no jealous fool to fright himself with his own spectre. He would lose no time in thinking, but would act at once. Indeed he could do no less than go to Goring House on that afternoon and ask after Miss Mervyn's health; that was the first step to be taken. And Tom was always happy when he had something to do Perhaps he should see her, and then—— But he would make no further plan. What he should say to her must depend on her

health and her mood, and on all the happy chances of the time. Enough for him to see his next step plain before him, and to step out like a man.

The frost still held, and Tom, true lover of horses, would neither ride nor drive, if he could help it, on the iron-bound road. So after luncheon he set out again on foot and with good courage and the hope to see his lady's face.

When Tom arrived at Goring House he was chilled by an unusual silence. The bell, which he pulled with his peculiar vigour, sounded an alarm; but yet some minutes passed before the footman came. Miss Mervyn was better, but not well enough to receive visitors. The last of the house party had gone away after breakfast. Mr. Mervyn had gone too, and his man had followed him with luggage, as it was uncertain how long his business would keep him in London. Tom

asked if Mrs. Vere was at home, and if she would see him; and the footman, having gone to inquire and returned with a favourable answer, led Mr. Fane into the cold and empty drawing-room.

Mrs. Vere had an admirable manner, which she had adopted as most appropriate to a lady who had had losses. It was respectful, conciliatory, but with no trace of servility. If it had a fault, it was a certain want of nature. She came in now with a sympathetic air, but with just enough inquiry to show, as a duenna ought to show, that she doubted the wisdom of a young man calling in the absence of the master of the house. Tom, remembering the want of politeness in de Courcy's manner to this lady, took care to emphasise his own civility. He apologised for disturbing her, and asked with interest after her health before he confessed, as he confessed with the utmost candour, that his

object in coming was to ask about Miss Mervyn. 'I could not rest,' he said, 'till I was sure that she was none the worse for the shock.'

'It was very kind of you,' said Mrs. Vere, with soft emphasis, 'and I am glad to say that dear Sibyl is really better. Indeed she is not really ill at all.'

'Then perhaps I might see her,' suggested the young man eagerly.

The lady smiled slightly and favoured him with a look of deprecation. 'I am afraid,' she said, 'that that must not be. We must keep dear Sibyl very quiet for a few days. Perhaps, when Mr. Mervyn returns——'

She was very polite, but her purpose was unmistakable. She wished Mr. Fane not to call again until the young lady's natural protector had returned.

'I think,' she began again after a minute,

as Tom stood uncertain, 'that, if you will excuse me, I ought to return to our dear——'

'Oh, I must be off,' he said, before she had finished her little speech, for he saw no way of ignoring the polite dismissal. He shook her warmly by the hand, looked at her as if he would insure her sympathy, and turned towards that window at the end of the room from which he had seen de Courcy descend a few days before.

'Oh,' said Mrs. Vere with a little laugh, which seemed to recognise the confusion of lovelorn youth. 'Oh, not that way, I think; the front door is on this side.'

'Thanks, but this will do me well enough,' said Tom simply; 'I am walking, and it's shorter for me over your park wall.'

He opened the window as he spoke, and stepped into the garden. The air was keen, and he ran down the steps and went quickly along the well-known walk. He had but

just passed the sun-dial when he saw walking towards him on the same path a young girl: he would have known her among a thousand to be Sibyl.

'Oh!' he cried out, 'how lucky I am! I have just been to ask after you, but they told me I must not see you, and—oh, I am so glad to see you again!'

He caught her dear hand in his, but she drew it away; her eyes rested on him for a moment with a trouble which he could not understand, but he saw that she was pale, and his heart ached for her.

'Sibyl,' he said, before he knew that he would call her by her name, and he tried to take her hand again; but she snatched her hands from him, and without a word hurried away to the house.

Tom stood staring, and enduring so keen a pang as he had never known. He saw Sibyl hurry up the steps and cling to Mrs.

Vere, who had followed the young man out on to the terrace ; and without one look for him the two women passed from his sight into the house.

Tom's pride was hurt, the sensitive pride of a boy who had always thought well of himself and of his people since he thought at all. Was this the way to treat an honest and a gallant wooer? This was that caprice of woman, which had been described by male writers, mocking or patronising, in the few books of fiction which the young man had read. He had not thought that Sibyl would treat him like that. She had snatched her hands from his, as if he were offensive to her ; she had run away from him to that old humbug of a dragon, who had clearly intended him to suppose that her charge was too weak to leave her room. The ways of women were unpleasant in that hour to young Tom Fane. His course of conduct was happily plain in

his eyes; he would not imitate the tortuous diplomacies of the weaker sex; he would go on with his life, as if no women existed. He would show this disdainful girl that he could do without her. If only the frost would go, he was sure that he could do vastly well without her.

For two days Tom was determined; but on the third day he thought that he had business in the town, and, as he could not gain the town without passing the lodge of Goring House, it seemed absurd not to stop for a moment and ask when Mr. Mervyn was expected back. It was but neighbourly. Not for the wealth of Golconda would he enter the domain; as he asked his question at the gates, he would scarcely allow his eyes to explore the place within. He saw nothing—not the merest flutter of a gown, which might be hers. From the lodge-keeper he learned that Mr. Mervyn was not expected

back at present. Rather slowly went the young man into the town, and rather slowly came he back again, till he had passed the familiar gates. His pride was satisfied, but there was something wanting in his life; he assured himself that it was a great thaw which was wanted; he went home rather sadly.

As Tom wearied of his dignified attitude, soft thoughts began to assail him in his milder moments. Had he not been too quick to think ill of the girl? He remembered her kindness of the last winter before she had gone, a fair prospecter, to seek the hidden marvels of the London world. And she had been kind in London too in that first summer of her butterfly life, and had been so glad to welcome her country neighbour in the crowded ball-room, and to show him that he was different in her eyes from the young men who were her new acquaintance. She had

been so frank for all her modesty, and, if she had not been frank, the delicate colour coming in her fair young cheek would have betrayed her, and her clear eyes would have told him that she was not careless of his presence. And now a moment's silence, a brief strangeness in her conduct, had made him not only doubt her but condemn. He began to think that he had been too hasty; and he shook his head and told himself that it was likely that, though he had never thought about it before, he was often too hasty. There must be some other cause for Sibyl's discontent with him—something other than the mere caprice which explained the conduct of other girls.

CHAPTER VI

WHEN Tom began to think of possible causes, his thoughts flew with fatal readiness to Gabriel de Courcy. During these long days, which had gone since last he had seen his love, the shadow of de Courcy had been constantly beside him, and he had determined again and again to ignore the shadow. He had told himself that he was a fool to let this man possess his thoughts unduly; that he had no reason to believe that this unnecessary stranger even admired Sibyl. Probably a negress in a yellow turban was more in his line. And yet how great a part of Tom's uneasiness was Mr. de Courcy! And when he doubted if caprice alone explained the girl's

strange conduct to him, all his doubts kept turning again and again towards her father's tenant. He was sure that the fellow was madly in love with Sibyl—how could he help being madly in love with her? And he was after her money too; all these romantic foreign-looking men are notoriously hunters of the heiress. And by some of the underhand means, which were his natural methods of working, the wily Creole had brought to her ears some wicked libels against him, Tom Fane, who had always been such a good fellow. That was the cause of all; she had heard some lying tale of him; he was as sure of it as if he had heard it.

Now, if it were true that he had been thus basely attacked, what a fool he had been for these past days! He had been sulking in his tent, nursing his foolish pride, and leaving a clear field to a rival. At this thought he began to walk about in great excitement, for

he held that he had been doing just what the other had wished him to do; he had danced to the other's piping. If de Courcy was, as Tom maintained, like an Italian organ-grinder, he, Tom, had been playing the part of monkey. What a thought was there! At least he would sit sulking no more; he would be up and doing; and with the thought of action came a new pleasure, and almost instantly, as if inspired, he saw his next move.

Off he started with a buoyant air to call upon de Courcy. It was a fine idea. He had been introduced to this temporary neighbour, and it was but polite in him to call; and calling he would see the fellow face to face, and look into his eyes and decide if he were a villain or no; and he would casually mention the name of Miss Mervyn and see at a glance if the fellow dared to love her. After his days of inaction this expedition was delightful; it had even a flavour of adventure, which ap-

pealed to all the boyhood in the boy. Off he marched through the keen frosty air to satisfy his troubled heart and his youthful curiosity. He was eager to see how the Creole looked at home, and what sort of a place the Cottage was, for he had never been behind its garden walls. He whistled, as he walked, a gallant air.

The Cottage had been built by a former owner of Goring House for an old lady of the family, who could not disconnect gentility from absolute privacy; and so some light and air had been sacrificed to the necessity of strict seclusion. All round the garden rose a high stone wall, pierced only by the one door which opened into the grounds of Goring House, and by the other equally severe which opened into the road. No handsome gates and carriage-sweep, which Cockney villas show, would do for that exclusive old lady, and no rude passer-by had seen her in her day, nor

even the roof of her abode, which was but two storeys high. This old lady was a tenant very different from Mr. de Courcy, but he too had been pleased by the quiet and seclusion of the place.

In due time Tom arrived at the forbidding door, which opened into the road, and pulled the iron bell-handle beside it. He waited, grew impatient and pulled again; he waited, grew more impatient and pulled a third time; and then he treated the door to an indignant push with his foot before he turned away. The door opened before his boot, and surprised him very much; it had worn a look of bolts and bars and mystery, and it had not even been latched. After all de Courcy might not be a villain; perhaps his air of mystery was delusive as his gate's, and he too would stand open, with no secrets to reveal, at the first shove of the inquiring Fane. Tom in his pleasure at getting inside gave de

Courcy the full benefit of the doubt. The garden was dull with something more than a winter dulness; it was formal and forlorn; and, though the afternoon sunshine still came sloping in over the wall on Tom's left, it only showed more clearly the untidiness of the straight grass borders and of the artfully-grouped neglected shrubs. The intruder stepped up to the Cottage and pushed the front door, but that was fastened, and there was no bell beside it. After a moment's hesitation he walked round the house, rehearsing under his breath the words of apology which he would use if he met de Courcy; but not a person was visible nor a sound heard. On the further side, which faced northward and towards the more majestic pile of Goring House, he found a big window which opened like a door. He hesitated again but only for a moment, before he pushed it; it opened to his hand. Since

nobody would answer his bell, and doors and windows were left thus unbarred, he felt that he did no wrong in stepping into the stranger's abode. He would lay his card on the table; for, though he felt with pleasure that he was being for the first time in his life distinctly diplomatic, he would not play the spy; he at least had nothing to conceal; he would go in and look about him and leave his name to show where he had been.

In pushing open the window Tom nearly pushed over an easel, on which an unframed canvas stood. In that low room a painter must work very near to the window, if he would work in winter at all. Now the room, though it was not yet late in the afternoon, seemed dark to the young man after his sun-lit walk, and he did not see the easel until he saw it tottering and caught it with both hands. As he steadied it he began to see the canvas more clearly; he bent forward peer-

ing at the picture, and then he straightened himself with an angry exclamation. It was a picture of Sibyl, unmistakable though unfinished. He forgot to shut the window beside him; he only stared at the portrait with helpless indignation. It was a clever picture, though to its present critic it seemed wholly bad. Indeed it would not have pleased him, even if he had felt no interest in the sitter; for to him a good picture was something much worked over and highly polished, and this bold sketch with its certain nervous strokes of the brush was ugly in itself as well as profoundly impertinent. He condemned it utterly; he fancied that it was Frenchy like its author; he only wished with all his power of wishing that he could doubt its subject. He did not know whether to be glad or sorry that it was less pretty than she; but the well-taught brush had fixed there for his annoyance the whole look

of the girl, her own attitude, her own turn of the neck and poise of the little head. Had the painted face been a blank, he must have known who this was that mocked him with her presence in his rival's room.

How many sittings had this picture needed? Tom cursed his ignorance of painters' methods; he could not tell if she had sat twice or a dozen times. What did it matter? Here she had come to sit to this stranger—perhaps she had gone not ten minutes ago; there was a chair there, close to him, where the scanty light from the window must have fallen; there she had been sitting; he was as sure of it as if he had seen her. But it was not he who had seen her, but that fawning villain who had been privileged by his poor pretence of art to stare and stare again at her fair fragile beauty. So the young man stood inflicting ingenious tortures on his soul so

little used to pain. Had she come in secret? Not a word had been said of any portrait on that wretched night, when Tom dined at the House. Either it had been begun since that night so short a time ago, or else it was a secret between that man and her. How had the subtle wretch persuaded her to such a thing? And had she come alone? There was torture in the mere question. Alone—or with that suave old woman, whom Mr. Mervyn trusted so utterly, and who would be so easily beguiled, as old women are, by soft brown eyes and an oily tongue. Had he such a jewel to wear, he would not leave it to the care of any other; he would not go money-hunting to the City, while his only child was being ensnared. He drew his hand angrily across his boyish eyes and, when he had withdrawn it, there was the canvas, no evil dream, but the tangible sad sign of all his woe. With a

rash oath he drew back his stick, as if he would drive it through the accursed picture; and standing so he started at a sound.

The room, though low, was long, and all of it except the part close to the window, wherein the young man stood and the easel, was full of a darkening dusk. At the slight sound Tom peered into the gloom, and at the far end of the place was something, black on black. Was it a human face? His eyes ached with the effort of seeing as they gradually detached the thing from the obscurity in which it was; and his heart beat wildly as there came a white gleam across it and was gone. His arm drawn back with the stick in hand remained rigid; he could not turn his eyes for a moment from this which fascinated them; surely it was coming nearer, but without a sound. Then Tom felt something press against his leg and he gave a cry. In the next moment he was furious

with himself for his crying out, for a great gross negress came out of the shadows laughing with insolence and pointing to her big black cat, which had rubbed itself against the visitor's leg. Tom had been frightened by that nurse, of whom de Courcy had talked so absurdly, and by a cat; he felt as if he should never forgive himself.

The negress came close to Tom, so close that he felt the oppression of her size and strength. She stared at the picture and then at the young man, and she grinned again, showing her strong white teeth like a beast's. 'Where is Mr. de Courcy?' asked Tom with a dignity born of rage; but the woman only shook her head and laughed again an evil laugh. Then she drew herself up till she looked gigantic in the low room and pointed through the open window; and Tom saw with a horrid thrill that the nail of the pointing finger had been cut into a short

strong point; there flashed on his mind de Courcy's tale of poison under a sharpened finger-nail. He was full of loathing for this huge unwomanly woman, who was ordering him from the place. With all the dignity which he could assume he went out through the window; and the negress followed so closely that he felt as if he were being noiselessly pushed from the house and through the garden and out into the road.

From the road Tom looked back to the door in the wall and there was the black face full of malice and mockery. Then the door was closed without a sound. As the poor boy went homeward his eyes were smarting with tears of shame.

CHAPTER VII.

WHOLESOME without doubt it was for young Tom Fane to learn that life was not a triumphal procession with gates of brass flying open before him, and maidens meekly waiting for his nod. The poor boy, smarting with pain and shame, was less like the conqueror than the slave at his chariot wheel. He felt as powerless as he had not felt since he was a little boy in jackets eager for some entrancing sport, and pulled up short by an interfering tutor. The great machine of a public school had not always adapted itself to the quick wishes of the ardent little boy in jackets; but, since he had become a man, he had expected more and more strongly to do

what he liked, and to get what he wanted. And now he was ashamed, and felt his impotence. Thought of that black witch filled him with a repulsion, which was physical discomfort. He seemed to hear her Creole master laugh with his soft musical laughter, as the negress told him that he, Tom Fane, had come spying about the place, and had been repaid for his spying by a sight of the tormenting picture; and told him too that she had thrust the intruder out with lack of ceremony. For Tom felt as if he had been pushed into the road.

What could he do? His mind was busy with thoughts of Sibyl, and he saw no way to help her. The shock had changed him; he only thought of her with tenderness, and a sense of his own weakness; there was no room for doubts of her, of her caprice, of her acquiescence. Her treatment of him was a small matter. He only felt the horror of his

darling being in that evil place. He only saw her, innocent and fair, seated in that low room, breathing the same air as that foul negress, patient under the beguiling eyes of the outlandish painter. What evil drugs distilled from unknown herbs might taint that air! He saw her there a lady innocent amid the bestial rout. He had never been visited by such fancies; and he could not rid his clean mind of the fumes, as he could not rid his healthy body of the feeling that the gigantic negress was at his shoulder. He was quivering with fear for his love, and with exquisite pity.

The immediate effect of Tom's new sense of weakness was an eager wish to find somebody who would help him; and his first gleam of hope came with the thought of Mr. Mervyn. He made up his mind to go at once to London. He was full of this plan when he picked up a letter from the hall-

table, and read with a careless eye that one of his college friends was starting for Paris and desired his company. He read the letter as he went upstairs, and threw it open on to his bed; these fair-weather friends seemed inadequate, and Paris somewhere in another world; all the world was packed for him into the small domain of Goring House. He rang the bell, ordered his servant to pack his portmanteau, and went downstairs to find his father.

Old Tom Fane asked no questions; he had a very robust confidence in his boy; and for the rest he supposed that the impossibility of hunting was enough to explain a young man's going to town. It tried even his patience to stay quietly at home, and prod the ground from hour to hour with an inquiring stick. For the time of inquiry had come. Full four-and-twenty hours ago old Tom had put his nose out into the nipping

air, and had announced that he could smell the coming thaw; and now the thaw had come, the wind had swung away from the binding quarter, and all the land was dripping.

'Don't stay too long,' said the good gentleman, 'or you will miss a day.'

Young Tom promised a quick return. He was impatient to be gone. He did not seem to breathe freely till he was in the train and the train was rushing to London.

On the next morning Tom went to Mr. Mervyn's office, and was lucky enough to find the gentleman alone in the partners' room. He was received with the cordiality to which he was accustomed, and he went at the affair as he would have gone at a big place in the hunting-field.

'I do wish you would come back to Goring House,' he said.

'You are very good,' said Mr. Mervyn,

with a little laugh which expressed surprise; 'but I do not think I shall leave town at present.'

'But I am sure you ought to come back,' said Tom with conviction.

The prosperous gentleman, leaning back in his chair, looked at the impulsive youth with raised eyebrows and a pensive smile. The eyebrows seemed to say that the advice was uncalled for, and the smile that young men were an interesting study. The effect was naturally irritating.

'Only hear me,' said Tom; and he rushed into an account of his visit to the Cottage and his discovery of the picture. As he spoke he felt that his tale did not sound as impressive as he had meant it to be; and he saw that the listener was grave but calm. It was impossible to make him feel the situation as he had felt it.

When Tom had finished his tale there was

a brief pause, and then Mr. Mervyn, permitting himself to smile again, said, 'I really think that I am entitled to ask you why you are so deeply interested in this affair of the picture?'

'Did you know about it?' asked Tom hotly.

'I don't mind saying that I did not,' said the other coolly. 'But why do you interest yourself in a matter so unimportant?'

'Because I think the fellow isn't worthy to look at—at Miss Mervyn, and that Mrs. Vere is no good at all.'

'I have a very high opinion of Mrs. Vere,' said Mr. Mervyn, with a too obvious air of humouring a very unreasonable person. 'I have entire confidence in the judgment and integrity of Mrs. Vere.'

'Then why does she let Sibyl——'

'Sibyl?' repeated Mr. Mervyn, when emotion stopped the utterance of the younger man.

'Really you must forgive me for repeating my former question somewhat bluntly; but what business is it of yours?'

'It is my business,' said Tom, 'because I love her.'

'Ah!' cried Mr. Mervyn, looking with more real liking at his friend. And after a minute he added, 'Now I think that I see the matter more clearly.'

Tom grasped the hand which the other extended; but Mr. Mervyn made haste to hold up a warning finger. 'We must talk this matter over,' he said. 'And in the first place let me tell you at once that I have no personal objection to you—quite the contrary.'

'Thank you,' said Tom.

'Only, if you care to take my advice, you will be in no hurry to speak to Sibyl. I can assure you that I understand my girl thoroughly—that she has not a thought or

wish which is not perfectly clear to me. She likes you.'

'I think she did like me,' said Tom growing very red.

'But she is entirely heart-whole—you may take my word for that. She is very young, and is even young for her years. She has no thought of love and marriage. For your own sake you will do well to delay. And now frankly about this portrait, in which I now admit your full right to be interested. The point is that you think Mrs. Vere not fit for her duties. It all comes to that; for you would neither say nor think that Sibyl would go to sit for her picture without the knowledge of her appointed *chaperon*.'

'No,' said Tom.

What else could he say? And yet there came thronging those horrid doubts. Did he doubt the girl, for whom he had just boasted of his love?

'No,' said Tom.

'The question is simply one of the abilities of Mrs. Vere. Now on that point there can be no doubt at all. I will not speak of the extraordinary testimonials which I received from the very best people; I prefer to base my certainty on my own observation and knowledge of character. Either I am a fool, or Mrs. Vere is a person of quite exceptionally scrupulous conscience, and quite exceptional strength of character.'

Mr. Mervyn stopped, and looked at Tom. But Tom could say nothing; he was clearly debarred from expressing further doubts of the integrity or strength of mind of his lady's duenna. The alternative was appalling.

'As to this portrait,' said Mr. Mervyn, 'you may be sure that Mrs. Vere approves. It is probably a little surprise for me, which your zeal (quite natural under the circumstances) has prevented. Anyway Mrs. Vere's

approval is absolute proof that there is no danger of Sibyl acquiring an undue interest in the painter. Do you follow me?'

'But——' said Tom.

'One moment,' said the elder man, with the comfortable smile with which a really sensible person sees his admirable arguments extend themselves before him. 'Let us, purely for the sake of argument, suppose that there is some faint danger of a young lady feeling an undue interest in a young man. Then don't you see that any attempt to warn that young lady against him, or to keep the two apart, would be a grave error in diplomacy? Don't you see that the man is at once presented to her eyes as dangerous—as irresistible perhaps? Don't you see that the course which you recommend would appeal at once to the romance which is latent in all young girls?'

'But I don't recommend anything of the

sort,' said Tom sharply; 'I only want you to go back to Goring House, and to be with her yourself.'

'Well, well,' said Mr. Mervyn with benevolent superiority, 'I have already told you that that is wholly unnecessary. Business of importance will keep me in town for some time yet; and I have left in the country a substitute as efficient for her especial duties as I could be myself. You need not make yourself uneasy in the least degree. I spoke, for the sake of argument, of the possibility of a dawning fancy in my girl for young de Courcy; but there is nothing of the sort. I assure you again that I know Sibyl thoroughly, and that she is entirely heart-whole. You have my best wishes, and, when the time comes for you to speak, you shall have my best support. Good-bye, my dear boy, and make yourself perfectly easy.'

Tom found himself conducted affection-

ately into the outer room, full of clerks and bright brass rails; and from thence he went into the crowded City street, and walked westward with the roar of traffic in his ears and a mind full of whirling and distracted thoughts. It had all sounded so sensible.

CHAPTER VIII.

He who exhorts an anxious man to free his mind from all anxiety, wastes his breath as surely as the eminent specialist who warned the blind man against reading by candle-light.

Mr. Mervyn returned to the consideration of the piece of business which was exercising his best faculties, with the conviction that he had cured his young visitor of foolish fancies, while Tom was being borne towards his native place with fancies more or less foolish swarming about him, and adapting themselves with evil ingenuity to the rhythmical beating of the train. He was not wholly content with the admirable sense of the

sensible person whom he hoped to reverence some day as his father-in-law. He would have sought advice from others; but, as he reviewed his friends, he saw, more clearly than he had ever seen before, that he did not think much of the opinions of those good companions. His friends were capital fellows; but they had been wont to come to him for advice, and even in the matter of horse-flesh he had no doubt of the superiority of his own judgment. He had been the clever man of his set at school and college—and he now said to himself, somewhat ruefully, that it was not saying much. He wished that he had cultivated some of the cleverer chaps; he wanted to turn to somebody; he had never felt so weak. The only fixed purpose among his uneasy doubts was to go back to the neighbourhood of his love. To be near to her was something; he would be untiring and vigilant, and hope that he would find

something to do for her; in that hope only did he find comfort.

At the very door of his father's house the discomfited young man met a piece of news which gave him a chance of action. That other young man, whose duty it was to clean his guns and his hunting-breeches, and who was moreover of a guileless and friendly nature, met him with open amazement.

'Why, sir,' he said, 'I told 'em you had gone to Paris.'

'Told who?' asked Tom, with his usual promptitude and disregard of pedantic grammar.

'A groom rode over, sir, from Goring House to ask when you were expected back.'

How did they know that he had gone away? He had told nobody of his intention, and he had been absent but a single night. Tom felt as if he were surrounded by spies;

he felt his honest flesh creep at the insidious idea; he looked at the open face of his servant with a suspicion which surprised the amiable fellow.

'When did you say I should be back?' he asked curtly.

'Why, sir, I said you'd be gone a long time; I said you'd gone to Paris with Mr. Stanhope.'

Upon this Tom remembered the pressing invitation of his friend Stanhope, which he had left open on his bed, and which he had clean forgotten till that moment. He was not much annoyed with his servant for having read it; he laughed in the good fellow's face, thinking that one who betrayed himself with such simplicity would make but a poor spy.

Tom wondered why that groom had been sent from Goring House. Was Sibyl sorry for her strangeness at their last meeting?

'Did the groom say who sent him?' he asked his man.

'No, sir.'

Anyway it was a lucky chance that the groom had come and had carried back a false report. It gave Tom an excuse for an immediate visit. On the very next day he would hasten to the house, to which his thoughts were hastening every hour, and would tell the ladies that he had returned and would ask what they wanted of him. What could she want? What would he not do to please her—to help her—perhaps to save her? He fell asleep with a prayer for his dear love upon his lips.

The next day was Sunday, and the silent Sunday hours seemed to creep till it was time to go. It was an exquisite day, with a touch of the softness of the far-off spring. Rain had fallen in the night, but the sky was blue in the morning, and its blue under

the sweet influence of a westerly wind was no more that hard metallic colour which is seen when the east wind blows. Genial was the day, softening the skin of man and the rind of earth, restoring the duck to the puddle and arousing in the well-closed stable a dumb desire of galloping. The sun shone fair on young Tom Fane, and he could not stop the stirring of hope within him, as he walked towards the home of his love. He was visited by a shy presentiment of joy. Several little things had fallen out well for him; and his father had charged him with a message for the leading veterinary surgeon of the town, and this gave him a second excuse, where none was necessary, for going towards Goring House.

Should he see her, and how would she receive him? How different was this young man, who walked with beating heart towards his lady fair, from the Tom Fane with the

conqueror's air, who had felt that he could choose his own time for demanding an unconditional surrender! The fear of losing this girl had made her inexpressibly dear; though her lover did not know how much his little love had grown, and would have proclaimed with conviction that he had always been desperately in love with his Sibyl.

At the lodge-gate he hesitated; he was half afraid to put it to the touch, half inclined to go on to the town with the message for the skilful horse-doctor. But he was a brave fellow; and he passed the boundary as Cæsar crossed the Rubicon. After all he was only going to call on the ladies (in the plural) and to ask what they wanted of him. Who knows if the great Julius were not more afraid when in his youth he crossed the threshold of his earliest love than when he advanced his Gallic banners against the

might and majesty of Rome? However that may be, young Tom Fane went boldly up the avenue to call at Goring House. But, before he reached the front door, he saw not far away on his right hand a lady. Promptly yielding to his first impulse he turned to the right and went towards her, and, as he came near, he saw, as he had hoped, that the lady was Sibyl.

Sibyl turned at the sound of someone coming, and, when she saw who it was that came towards her, so sweet a colour rose unbidden to her cheek, and such frank pleasure to her eyes, that Tom had much ado not to take her to his heart. Indeed his heart had leaped at the first sight of her face, for there, instead of the coldness or the fear which he had feared to see, he read kind welcome. He longed to throw himself on the softening earth, and kneeling there to dedicate his life to the care of her; but he

only shook the little hand, which came so friendly into his. He remembered her father's advice, which helped him to cool his natural ardour; and too there was that in her fine maidenliness which awoke the utmost chivalry of the gallant boy and made him blush even for his thought of kissing her. So, as they said 'How d'ye do?' to each other, they were both blushing.

'My father says that we shall be hunting to-morrow,' said Tom, for they had begun to exchange some mutual confidences about the weather, while inwardly he was pouring forth to her most eloquent vows of love and loyalty.

'Does he?' said Sibyl arching her eyebrows at the sky.

'Yes; it has been no end of a thaw, and the country is getting capital. Shall you be at the meet?'

'If Mrs. Vere is back in time,' she said.

'Has she gone away? Where is she? I ought to have asked after Mrs. Vere before. Where has she gone to?'

'She went up to London for Sunday.'

A sudden thought came to Tom, and he asked, 'Was it Mrs. Vere who sent the groom to our place to ask when I should be back?'

'Why, have you been away?' asked Sibyl.

'Didn't you know it?'

Here was a brisk exchange of questions and never an answer; but Tom was satisfied. He saw in a moment that Mrs. Vere was interested in his movements, and that she would not leave her charge while he was in the neighbourhood. Hearing that he had gone to Paris, she had ventured to London for a couple of nights. But here was a very foolish dragon in Tom's eyes! It was clear that she was guarding Sibyl against him, who was as honest and true a lover as the sun shone on, while she had let herself be blinded

or humbugged by that other man, who was so different. She did not mind leaving her precious charge alone, though in the Cottage close by was that insidious stranger with a garden-key and a picture on the easel. 'Have you been giving any more sittings for your portrait?' he asked with a gallant effort for ease.

'My portrait?' she asked.

'I called upon your neighbour, de Courcy, the other day,' said Tom carelessly, but with a little pause before the name, which seemed to stick to the roof of his mouth; 'and I saw the picture—your portrait, you know.'

'Has Mr. de Courcy got my picture?' asked she.

Tom saw a shadow of uneasiness in her look, and he said rather sharply, 'Of course he has—surely you gave him sittings for it?'

'No,' she said; 'never.'

Tom looking in her candid eyes felt a

great relief. What a fool he had been! How right Mr. Mervyn had been! The painter, who must be devilish clever by the way, had been painting from memory. Tom did not hate him nearly so much. He had done him injustice, and now, 'He must be extremely clever,' he said with zeal.

'And did you think that I had been sitting for my portrait to—at the Cottage?' she asked, a little offended.

'Oh, I thought perhaps that you went with Mrs. Vere; a surprise for your father or something; I could not doubt—it was so like.'

Her face had lost some of its brightness; she seemed to be thinking, or trying to remember something not wholly pleasant. Tom, eager to efface the impression of his own mistake, spoke promptly of the happy thaw, the hunting prospects, their friends and neighbours; and the girl was bright and kind

again. 'But I must go in now,' she said presently, and she said 'Good-bye' as if she were a little sorry to go, and left Tom happier than he had been for days past. It was only when he had reached the Lodge that he remembered the message which he bore for his father, and so turned away from his home towards the town.

Stepping briskly towards the town Tom saw an old fly coming to meet him, and, glancing at the window as it passed, he saw a lady, and was sure that the lady was Mrs. Vere. She was huddled up in wraps, as she was wont to be, but he was sure that it was she. She had come back then before she was expected. Tom wondered why she had come back. Was it possible that she had heard of his return? But this was being too suspicious; and his thoughts went back to all his talk with Sibyl, to her looks and her words, which after all had not been amazingly

eloquent nor of general interest. To Tom her lightest word seemed at that hour worth all the eloquence of all the orators who ever spun, as spiders from their tiny stomachs, the intricate and ingenious web of fine forensic speeches. His heart was light, and for its very lightness he laughed aloud as he walked, for he thought that, if Mrs. Vere were hurrying home to guard his darling from him, she was too late. Not all the dragons in story-book could rob him of that meeting which had been; she might as well have stayed in town till Monday; she could not change the past. Still he was glad that she had come back, for now Sibyl would be at the meet to-morrow; he was sure now that no more frost would come, and that the balmy time was there for good. He hoped that the girl would know how well he sat his horse, and, if she could see anything of the run, would see him go straight.

Mr. Springer, the veterinary surgeon, was always glad to see any of the Fane family. He would be delighted to do what Mr. Fane senior wished; and he too gladdened Tom with a bold prophecy of hunting on the morrow. They talked over several horses of their acquaintance, and Tom asked affectionately after Mr. Springer's old grey mare.

'She's as well as ever,' said her owner with conviction, 'and fit to go as fast and as far.'

'She's a clipper,' Tom said with a nod.

'By-the-by,' said Mr. Springer, 'I've let her for to-morrow if it's fit for hunting, and I'm rather sorry for it, for the gentleman don't look a sportsman—to judge by looks. He takes the risk; but I should be sorry if anything were to happen to the old mare.'

'Who is he?' asked Tom.

'It's the gentleman that's taken Mr Mervyn's Cottage—Mr. de Courcy, I think his name is. Do you happen to know, sir, if

he can ride at all?' He asked the question with due earnestness.

'I don't know that he can't,' said Tom curtly. He thought that the fellow was always cropping up—that he too would see Sibyl at the meet. 'Then we shan't see you out to-morrow,' he said gloomily to Mr. Springer as he turned away.

'I'm too busy just now,' said Mr. Springer, much flattered by Tom's regret, 'but you'll see the old mare, and she's the better animal of the two.'

He laughed at his own familiar joke, and Tom laughed for civility's sake; but he laughed again presently for happiness as he remembered that he did not fear comparison in the hunting-field, and that the wish to hunt went far to prove that even the fascinating Gabriel was no vile intriguer. Better, far better, to have him out in the good air by the cover side than to think of him plotting

and planning in the low house behind the garden walls. He was ready to ride him a match for a monkey—or for a lady's hand, if it might come to that.

He passed the lodge of Goring House with one regretful look; he passed the garden wall of the Cottage; but when beyond the Cottage he came again to the lower wall which bounded his love's domain, his feet would go no further for a while. Evening was coming in with a soft promise of rain; there was no question for the morrow except about the shady side of the hedges. Tom laughing at himself set his hands on the wall and lightly vaulted over. He would not go home without the lover's privilege of looking at his mistress' window, though he laughed and blushed at his own sentimentality.

It was growing dark among the shrubberies of Goring House, and Tom, advancing towards them noiselessly on the grass, did not

see the lady seated on the bench till he was very near to her. It was Mrs. Vere, still huddled in her warm wraps, as there was need to be, for, though the frost was gone, it was not an evening on which prudent elderly ladies sit motionless in gardens. But not only was Mrs. Vere seated on the rustic bench; she even seemed to be asleep. Her figure wrapped in cloaks and Shetland shawls was quite still, and her head inclined forward, as if slumber had come upon her. Tom looked this way and that for Sibyl. It was not likely that the older lady was there for her own pleasure, instead of in a comfortable room with her toes at a lively fire; she must be on duty as companion of her young charge. Seeing no sign of her who filled his thoughts, the young man turned away; but he had only made a few steps when he stopped again. He was very loth to go; he would allow himself a peep into the other

paths which ran through those well-trimmed shrubberies. Presently he came to the path which ran beside the wall of separation between the grounds of Goring House and the garden of the Cottage, and as he glanced down this path the door in the wall was opened wide, and Sibyl came through.

It was Sibyl who came out of de Courcy's garden in the growing dusk; it was Sibyl who hurried up the path towards him. He drew back into the shrubs, dragging his stiff collar from his throat, feeling as if blood would burst his brain; he stared at her face, longing that all reality should be a dream, or he a madman, rather than that this should be the girl whom he loved. But it was the girl's face, with open eyes looking straight before them. Tom saw her, and saw almost as clearly a stage scene at which he had laughed a month ago—a scene of commonplace theatrical intrigue—a duenna asleep,

and her ingenuous maiden tripping from the pasteboard scene to a stolen meeting with her romantic swain; he smelt the gas of the theatre, and it made his head dizzy. Sibyl passed close beside him and did not see him. She hurried on, and he followed her for a few steps. Then he saw her reach the seat, where Mrs. Vere seemed still to be sleeping. He saw the woman move at the touch of the young girl, and then lay her hand in hers as if she needed help to rise. When she had risen she did not withdraw her hand, and hand in hand the two women went on towards the house.

Inflamed with jealousy Tom turned back, and went towards the Cottage. Furious words came crowding to his lips, and his fingers crooked themselves as he thought of de Courcy's throat. But he made a strong effort to control his rage, and stood still before the door. This door, which Sibyl

had left wide behind her, was now tightly closed and locked; and as Tom stood there trembling with the tumult of passions and trying hard to think, suddenly, in the dead oppressive silence, he heard from the garden within the gross chuckling laugh of a negress.

CHAPTER IX.

Mr. Fane the elder was a good landlord, a good farmer, and a good magistrate; but, though he neglected none of the works proper to a conscientious country gentleman, whose ancestors hung critical upon his ancient walls, the business which he approached with the most gravity was hunting. On a hunting morning (and most of his mornings after the first of September cub-hunting were hunting mornings) he rose early to inspect the weather and the weathercock with as deep a sense of responsibility as if he were the M. F. H. himself. For some years he had hunted that side of the county, and, though he had given

up the hounds to a younger and richer man, he had never rid himself of the feeling that he could be blamed most justly if hunting were stopped for long. The late frost had set his conscience quaking, and he hailed the genial thaw as a tardy friend who had come but just in time to save his credit.

All orders for the stable had been given on the previous evening, and, punctual to a moment, the good gentleman descended the stairs somewhat stiffly, very careful of his dress, and with a nice clean apron to protect his breeches; for, though he loved old roomy clothes on his pedestrian days, he knew well that extreme accuracy and neatness of attire was but the proper sign of respect for the sport which he loved. No less important business was allowed to come near him on a hunting morning; he ate an ample breakfast, for he lunched very lightly in the saddle; he waited for nobody, and asked no questions

before the moment came when he mounted his hack and trotted off to the meet.

Among the questions which old Tom Fane did not ask on this hunting morning was the question why young Tom had not appeared. The elder no more looked for the same faultless punctuality in the younger than he expected him to remember always to give the hounds more than enough room. He himself had been shouted at by his father, the old Tom Fane of that day; he shouted at his boy; and he hoped that his boy would holloa, in his turn, at an over-zealous son. It was the part of the young to ride a turn too hard, and of the old to rebuke them—with or without strong language. As for young Tom's non-appearance at breakfast, it was his affair if he liked to bolt his morning meal; the digestions of young Fanes were made for such experiments; and old Tom would not say a word unless his son, who probably would ride his

hunter to the meet, rode him too quick. That was a thing which no old Fane could stand; it was unfair on a horse; it was a very good opportunity for the rebuke of a young Fane.

As the old gentleman trotted on his good hack towards the meet, he was in high good humour. All the country was in tune. The ground looked fair enough—only suggesting a little care in alighting on the shady side of hedges; the sky was soft and not too bright; the wind was blowing softly from the side of duty; and, as Mr. Fane looked away across the fields and hedges through which his road ran, he said once again that there was no better country in England. There were covers enough, but not too many; good grass fields, but not so big as to suggest racers and greyhounds; ploughs for variety, but not too heavy; jumping enough to satisfy a budding steeple-chase rider, but not of a kind to test

the sensational timber-jumper; and lanes enough for those who knew them well, and who found themselves growing heavy. Indeed it was a good familiar country; though it is likely that old Tom need not have been so fearful of a rush of sportsmen from other countries. He was always afraid that a London contingent would appear—or a foreign potentate; that all the world would find out that he and his friends had a real good thing at their doors. Now they were a party of friends; a stranger was an event; they were a family party in the hunting-field, landlords and tenants, fathers and sons—a family party which included the fox, all as happy as men and foxes may be.

On this happy morning the family party appeared in force, with all their frozen faces relaxing into smiles. It was a favourite meet; there was always a good fox near at hand, willing to go, full of fun. All the familiar

faces were there of men and of horses too, and among them the familiar face of Springer's grey mare; but on the back of the old mare was a stranger, and old Tom riding up looked at him with doubt, and hoped with all his heart that he was not going to publish anything in a sporting paper.

Sportsmen are for the most part a kindly race, and tolerant of the errors of the weaker brethren. They know well enough that all birds do not fall dead to the first barrel and that many a worthy horseman looks anxiously for the comfortable gap; they confess that they always feel happier when they are over the first jump of the day. In real life they are kindly and helpful; it is only in print that they become awful, arrogant, sublimely contemptuous. Pen in hand, your sportsman is a terrible fellow, and every man, who does not stand or sit as he does, is held up to the scorn of innumerable readers as 'the wrong

sort.' Old Tom Fane did not denounce de Courcy as 'the wrong sort;' but he thought it likely that he had not hunted much. If he had not had such a strong prejudice in favour of minding his own business, he would have suggested to the stranger to take his stirrups up a couple of holes; he was obliged to pronounce his seat heterodox, but still the fellow looked as if he was at home on a horse. 'Rather a rat-catcher get-up,' said old Tom to himself, looking askance at the stranger's modest breeches and gaiters; 'it's lucky the old grey can take care of herself—and of him too.' He did not like to see so much levity on the brink of the important business of the day—to see a fellow laughing and chattering like a Frenchman, and moving in his saddle and showing his teeth as if he were grinning at his dentist.

And now the hounds began to move towards the nearest cover, and old Tom awoke

to the fact that his son was still absent. In spite of his rule that nothing should distract his attention from the business of the day, he could not help turning his eyes now and then towards his home; but it was not until the hounds were in the cover that young Tom appeared. What was the matter with the boy? His father looked at him with an anxiety which he could hardly conceal. He had ridden his hunter to the meet and ridden him much too fast; the noble animal was fretting at the strange treatment; and now his master turned and twisted him about as if he were looking for somebody, and as if to spare his horse were the last thing in his mind. There were a few ladies riding and a few more in pony-carts; and to these young Mr. Fane gave prompt attention. He pressed his gallant animal hither and thither till he had reviewed all the womankind, and had satisfied himself that Sibyl was not there.

Then old Tom saw him ride straight and close up to the stranger and address him; he saw the stranger start and turn suddenly white; he was sure that angry words flew quickly between them. 'What on earth is it?' said old Tom to himself; 'if I didn't know my boy, I should say he'd been drinking.' He put his horse in motion and rode towards the young men; but, before he reached them or more words could be uttered, there came a holloa from the far side of the little wood, and in a moment all were galloping.

The feuds and follies of young men shrunk to their proper insignificance. As old Tom Fane felt the strong horse under him settle down to work, he only thought of getting well away; and some minutes had gone before he even remembered his son. He found himself going well, and where he would be. There was a good scent, and

up a gently sloping field some way before him he saw the hounds streaming; he felt sure of a good run, and thought that he knew the fox who was before them. Then he allowed himself to look for his boy, and saw him in a moment, where he liked to see him, half a field ahead of himself. That was the place for a young Tom. He hoped that his horse would last. And the stranger was there too, half a field ahead, and going well. Old Tom looked at him critically, and watched him over the next hedge. 'He has the sense to let the old grey alone,' he said to himself. 'She knows the country, and knows where the fox is going too; I do believe she'd help to dig him out if we let her.' These fancies brought him to the hedge, over which his boy and de Courcy had disappeared, and his strong horse took him safely into the further field. 'I do believe those boys are racing,' said Mr. Fane

to himself with some disgust, as he saw young Tom and the stranger going fast across the big grass field, into which he had now safely descended. 'Tom ought to know better,' he muttered with growing disapproval. A minute later his disapproval was changed into amazement, and his amazement into horror. The biggest place which they had yet encountered was before the young men; and the old grey mare, that she might clear it well, shortened her stride and pulled herself together for the leap. At that moment old Tom Fane saw the rider of the mare turn his head and say something to young Tom, who was on his left hand, not half a length behind. He heard his boy cry savagely in answer, and saw him drive his spurs into his willing beast. As the old grey mare rose at the leap, Tom rode at her at full speed; his horse jumped with a great effort and struck the old grey in mid air;

horses and riders disappeared from the sight of old Tom Fane.

As soon as old Tom had jumped the place he saw that the old mare had picked herself up, and faithful to business was going her own line again, though without a rider. His son's horse stood trembling with excitement and the effect of strange treatment, and Tom himself stood staring at de Courcy, who lay motionless on the grass. Mr. Fane pushed his boy roughly to one side, and knelt down by the fallen man.

'Is he dead?' asked Tom with a hoarse strange voice.

CHAPTER X.

Not many hours later, young Tom Fane sat in his own room with his arms on the table before him, and his face pressed upon his arms. He had thrown off his coat when he first came in, but he had not felt the energy necessary to pull off his boots; and he sat in his hunting breeches, with his knitted waistcoat unbuttoned and his stiff necktie pulled away from his throat. He was listening for his father's step.

At last the stairs creaked, the door opened, and old Tom Fane came in.

'Well, you may thank God,' he said, when he had shut the door behind him.

Young Tom looked up with a dazed look. His short curly hair was in a tangle, and the healthy colour of his cheeks was all in blotches. His face asked questions which his dry tongue could not frame.

'He has spoken,' said old Tom, 'and spoken sense. I have seen the doctor, and he says he'll do.'

Young Tom had been sitting with his face hidden from the painful light, and with his whole soul filled with a terrible fear lest his foe should die; but no sooner was this fear removed than hard upon the first relief there arose in him a faint regret. His head fell forward on his arms again, and he groaned and clenched his hands.

'And now,' said old Tom sternly, 'you must tell me what you meant by it.'

As his son made no answer, he went on with returning anger. 'By Heaven,' he said, 'I never saw such a thing. It was the most

—the most unsportsmanlike thing I ever saw. And it was my boy who did it!'

'Father,' said young Tom, blindly stretching out his hand, 'don't be too hard on me; you don't know; I am so wretched; you don't know.'

'Then tell me,' said his father, sitting down squarely on the opposite side of the table.

Then young Tom Fane began to pour out the story of his woes—of his love, which had grown from a pleasant pastime fed by the happy fancies of a boy to an overmastering passion, which shook his voice as he spoke. He had not gone far when his father broke in upon him with a new indignation.

'And because you found out that you were being cut out by a rival, you rode at him like a coward to kill him. If that's your excuse, Tom, I wish to Heaven I'd been deaf before you made it.'

As the voice of the older man trembled

with the strength of his feeling, the younger recovered the mastery of himself. 'Father,' he said, and he looked him fairly in the face, 'you don't think that of me.'

'Can you tell me that I didn't see you ride at him?'

'No.'

'You rode at him?'

'Yes.'

'Very well then——'

'I love Sibyl with all my heart and soul,' said the young man, rising from his seat and speaking more slowly; 'I can't imagine my life going on year after year without her; but I would not try to injure—by Heaven, I would try to help any honest man and loyal gentleman whom she preferred before me. I have always had your example, sir.'

I do not know if he had ever called his father 'sir' before. Old Tom Fane looked at him with wonder, but with a growing hope.

And yet he checked the hope in a moment. He could not understand, and he shook his head, as he was apt to do when he could not understand, and hunched his shoulders and frowned.

'I rode at him,' said his son, 'because he turned and mocked me. I was in a fury; I had not an instant to think—oh, father, I know what it must have been for you to see!'

He went round the table and laid his hand upon his father's shoulder. Old Tom Fane made no impatient movement under his son's hand; he felt as if he saw daylight.

'What do you know against the fellow?' he asked.

'I know,' cried out young Tom, 'that he is taking my love from me by no fair means, but by some accursèd devilry.'

'What do you mean?'

'I don't know what I mean,' he said,

beginning to walk the room; 'but I know that Sibyl was as good as mine, that she was ready to love me, when this—this fellow by some devilish means began to win her away.' Walking up and down, he told his father how strange the girl had been, and above all how on that Sunday afternoon she had been so kind to him, and how and where he had seen her on the evening of the same day. 'Father,' he said, 'you know Sibyl; you know that she isn't a girl to encourage one man and let another make love to her—that she would sooner die than make secret appointments with anyone. I have been half mad and half ready to doubt her; but, when I think of her and try to see her face as it looked on that Sunday afternoon, I am as sure that she is true as that there is a sun in heaven. And since she is true, this wretchedness must be due to him and his devilry. That's what I felt when I went at

him; I felt as if I were striking at one of his devilish West Indian snakes, and I wanted to kill him.'

Old Tom shuddered at this frank confession, and shook his head the more; he was in sore perplexity. 'What do you mean by devilry?' he asked. 'What do you suspect the fellow of?'

'I don't know,' said his son; 'I know nothing about these things; it seems to me that I know nothing about anything, and it's that that makes me feel so weak and makes me mad. The night I met him at dinner at Goring House he was full of stories of damnable Creole trickeries and juggleries; and I thought they were all lies and swagger.'

'Of course,' said his father; 'and so they are.'

'I have heard men talk of mesmerism and magnetism and things; but I never paid any attention to them.'

'Quite right too,' said old Tom Fane.

'But that's the sort of thing I feel about it,' said his son hotly. 'The fellow has made me creep from the first; I felt as if there were something uncanny about him, something which I could not fight. It seems absurd for us here to be fancying such things; but that is what I feel, and I can't help it.'

'Oh, rid your mind of that stuff,' said old Tom bluntly. 'It is likely enough that, if he's such a bad lot—and he certainly is a rum 'un to look at—he is after the girl's money; and, finding you in the way, he has told her lies about you—frightened her perhaps—made her come to him for proofs or something. I do believe she's a good girl; but I take it that she is not one of the strong-minded sort.'

'All I know is,' said his son, 'that Sibyl is good and true as an angel, and that this

fellow has some bad influence over her; and, by Heaven, I'll have no thought nor care but to save her and to fight him!'

His father could not help looking at him with pride and love as he stood opposite to him with head up and clenched fists. 'But not with base weapons,' he said earnestly. 'To-day you fought with base weapons.'

'Yes,' said young Tom; 'and if I had killed him I should have been a——'

Old Tom roared out at him to drown the word. 'No matter for that!' he cried; 'it's all right now.'

'I'm glad I've told you all about it,' said his son; 'I feel better for telling you.'

'My poor boy,' said his father, 'my poor dear boy! And, by Heaven, we'll fight the fellow together, and best him too! Only, if he's the biggest cad unhung, we'll fight him like gentlemen.'

CHAPTER XI.

HAVING made up his mind for a campaign, Mr. Fane senior was all for prompt action. He proposed to advance upon London, to attack Mr. Mervyn in his mercantile fastnesses, and to force him to acknowledge that the care of a child was a duty no less important than the accumulation of money. But to this plan his son was opposed, and he told his father the story of his own expedition to London and its absolute failure. He was sure that his father would only dash himself in his turn against the polished steel of the merchant's admirable sense, and would make no impression thereon. It is true that Mr. Mervyn did not know that his daughter had

been seen hurrying at dusk from the Cottage garden; but young Tom Fane had a deep repugnance to any mention of that fact, even to the girl's own father, unless it should become undeniably necessary. He bound his father to remain absolutely silent about that evening vision; and he begged him to do nothing at all for him until he himself had made his next move and seen its effect.

'And what is your move?' asked old Tom, who was displeased at the prospect of inaction; for indeed he thought his boy in a most parlous state, being, as it were, confused by the heady passion of love, so that it had seemed no shame to ride at a brother sportsman in the hunting-field, and no absurdity to imagine a young man in an ordinary shooting-coat a dealer in black arts and unholy mysteries. 'What's your plan?' asked old Tom Fane, distrustful of dangerous or fantastic strategy.

'I shall go straight to Goring House,' said Tom, 'and ask to see Sibyl. I shall tell her that I love her, and ask her to be my wife. If she says "Yes," then she will tell me everything.'

This was a strong statement to make about an affianced woman; but old Tom only hunched his shoulders and kept silence.

'And I can be with her every day, and watch and guard her,' continued his son, 'and keep her from harm. And if she says "No"'—and here he stopped a moment for the lump in his throat—'I shall have shown her at least that I trust her wholly; and I will beg her, because I love and trust her wholly, though she will not take me for her husband, to talk to me as if I were her brother, and to tell me all about that man.'

'It's a manly and an honest course,' said old Tom, 'and I wish you luck and joy with all my heart—and a good wife.'

Young Tom Fane knew that his father was thinking of the wife whom he had lost six years before, and he went and took hold of his hand and squeezed it as a mark of sympathy. Mrs. Fane had been a good wife and a good mother, and memory of her was sad and sweet to both man and boy.

'But what am I to do?' asked old Tom after a minute shaking himself free, as it were, from memories which gave no help to the present purpose. 'I should like to do something to help you.'

'You have helped me enough,' said his son, 'by listening to me. I feel twice the man since I told you all about it; and it doesn't look half so bad. I can't think why I didn't come to you before.'

'Boys always go last to their fathers,' said old Tom curtly. 'I am glad that you came at last. But how about this fellow, who is in bed with a sore head? You have got to say

to him that you did the wrong thing and are sorry.'

'I'll say it,' said young Tom with determination; 'and then I can ask him what he meant by what he said to me, and what his pretensions are to—to her, and what the—the dickens he means by them, and——'

'And then you'll be at him again,' said his father, 'and have to go and make another apology, and so on for ever. No, my boy; I'll take your apologies for you. I'll tell you what I'll do. I'll ride in to the doctor's to-morrow morning early, and, if he'll give me leave, I'll go and see the fellow, and tell him you are sorry for the smash. Perhaps by the time the doctor will let me see him I shall be able to tell him that you are engaged to the young lady; and then you'll see that, having got nothing for his trouble but an imperial crowner, he'll take himself off and look out for another lady with expectations.'

So it came to pass that on the next day the two Fanes mounted the dogcart, and the father dropped the son at the lodge of Goring House, and drove himself on to the doctor's house in the town. In the morning air, and with definite work before them, they had both been more happy; but when they met again, each saw discouragement in the other's face, and the younger was by far the more gloomy. Indeed old Tom had expected little of that day. He had seen the doctor, had heard a good report of his patient, but had been warned to leave him alone for a few days. He did not like to wait with the regrets and apologies unspoken; they gave him a sort of indigestion; but still it was clear that he must not trouble de Courcy with such exciting stuff until the doctor pronounced him fit to receive visitors. He had hinted to his friend the doctor that his talk with the patient might produce a mild excite-

ment, and he had been pleased to see that the doctor showed no sign of unusual knowingness. Mr. Fane had thought very carefully about the unlucky affair in the hunting-field, and he was almost sure that nobody but himself could have seen the collision, and indeed that nobody else was riding the same line. Now, if the injured man had told anybody of the cause of his nasty fall, old Tom had good reason to think that he would have told the doctor. So, on the whole, he made up his mind to patience; begged his medical friend to let him know as soon as de Courcy might receive a visitor; and hoped that his frank appeal for pardon would be in time to stop the painful story at its first flutter.

But if old Tom Fane accepted his first repulse with resignation, young Tom showed much less patience. He had advanced upon Goring House repeating to himself those fervid words which were to win his love to

full confidence. He would hear all which she had to say about that fellow and his ill-omened influence; he would hear; he would comfort; he would take her in his arms and make her promise to have no secrets from him for ever and ever. The mists of doubt and evil fancies would vanish before his ardour; he would see that he had been disquieted by shadows, and though he told himself that he must be prepared to find that confidence did not include the acceptance of him as a husband, yet his quick imagination running on before embraced the girl and saw her blushes and her timid acceptance of his love. Hurrying his feet he already felt himself in her presence; and so arriving at the front door he had found that that commonplace barrier kept him absolutely from the realisation of his dreams. He had eyed the respectful servant, who refused to admit him, as if he would like to force an entrance

over his body; but the next moment he shuddered, for he remembered how short a time before he had yielded to one of these barbarous impulses and what result might have followed his yielding. What could he do or say? The footman informed him that neither lady was well enough to see anybody; that each was kept in her own room. Had he heard when Mr. Mervyn was expected back? No. Mr. Mervyn had said nothing about returning. He hoped that Miss Mervyn was not in any way seriously unwell. No, the doctor had been to see Miss Mervyn, and had said that she must keep quiet for a few days; he believed that the doctor's opinion was that Miss Mervyn was suffering from a shock. And Mrs. Vere? Mrs. Vere was also suffering from a shock. After this the servant had shown civil signs of a desire to leave the door, and Mr. Fane unable to think of any other speech had

turned reluctantly away. On the next day Tom tried again to enter Goring House, but tried in vain. He returned to his father with deep discouragement. 'It must be an excuse,' he said; 'it's not likely that they are both too ill to see me.'

'Oh yes, it is,' said old Tom Fane, and he shook his head somewhat sadly; 'if there were twenty women in the house they might all be ill, every one of them, and every one of them giving the others the best advice, and not one of them taking it. You don't understand women.' Young Tom felt no desire to understand women; he only wished to see Sibyl. He was haunted by the fear that the shock from which she was suffering had been the news of de Courcy's accident; he was haunted by fears and recurring questions, and only longed to disperse them before the sunshine of his lady's face.

As early as seemed permissible on the

third day Tom made another effort. He heard without surprise that Miss Mervyn was not yet well enough to receive visitors; but the footman thought that perhaps Mrs. Vere would see him. Tom seized this slight advantage, and at once made his way to the drawing-room, while the servant went in search of the lady. He had not walked many times up and down the long room before the lady wrapped in a warm shawl came in. She came in with her usual propitiatory stoop, as if she came to meet the slightest advances more than halfway. It was so kind of Mr. Fane to come so often to inquire, and she was so sorry that she had not been able to see him on his former visits. She was so sorry too that their dear Sibyl was not yet well enough to leave her room, and she hoped that very soon their dear Sibyl would be strong enough to receive all her friends. She smiled with so engaging a mixture of

affection and apology as she uttered this last hope that the young man, though he rebelled at being included in the general mass of Miss Mervyn's friends, could only smile in answer as if she had promised him all which he wished. But he found, when he had left the house, that all which he had gained from his interview with the most polite of women was a lesson in the most conciliating manners; while on his side he had allowed it to be understood that he would come there no more until Mrs. Vere should write that Sibyl was downstairs. Mrs. Vere had promised to write as if she were conferring the greatest possible kindness; and it was not until they had parted that Tom began to wonder uneasily if her promise bound him to indefinite inaction. To do nothing was the worst thing in the world for Tom.

CHAPTER XII.

SADDENED by his unsatisfactory interview with Mrs. Vere, and walking with none of his usual buoyancy, Tom passed through the shrubberies of Goring House, and from the end of one of the paths glanced without thinking at the door which led into the Cottage garden. The door stood open, and Tom was alert in a moment; it was an invitation to action. Without hesitation he entered the little garden, marched straight across the grass now softened by the genial weather, and so advanced towards the window which he had entered on his last unpleasant visit. He was going to ask after the health of de Courcy, whom he supposed to be still in bed;

but that which had really moved him and, as it were, roused him to life again, was the hope of finding something to do and the excuse for lingering near his lady's home.

Tom was about to go round the house to the front door and to make his presence known by vigorous pounding thereon, when he saw that de Courcy was working at the easel, which stood—where it had stood before—just inside the window. He stopped short and looked at the painter, who was working with such zeal that, sensitive though he was, he was wholly unconscious of observation. In a moment Tom saw de Courcy's head turn from the canvas towards the interior of the room, and like a flash he remembered where the sitter's chair had stood when he had been in that room before. Each alternate minute the painter's head turned from his picture towards the place where the chair must be. He was painting from a sitter then. From

whom? If the canvas were the same which had stood on the easel when Tom saw it last, then the sitter—not even to himself did he say who might be sitting in that chair, which he longed and feared to see. He could not burst open the window, lest the shock might injure her. He must go round then and get in as he could. Quickly and silently he turned the corner of the house; and as he turned it his eye, exploring eagerly that side of the Cottage, saw that one of the windows on the ground floor was not bolted. He pushed up the sash and climbed over the sill. There and then came to him the thought that it was strange indeed that he of all men should be climbing like a conspirator into his rival's house; but he tossed the thought from him with scorn. Was this a time for nice distinctions? Should he stop to measure his conduct now with his ten-inch rule of 'good form'? Sibyl was there, or so he feared—

Sibyl, his love, practised upon perhaps by vilest arts. His one duty, his one purpose was to take the shortest way which led to her. He must gain her side and guard her, though it were against the powers of hell. He delayed not a moment. From the room into which he had climbed he went straight into the narrow ill-lit passage, and from the passage he looked into that other room where, dark against the window with its northern light, the painter was at work.

Tom moved a little forward till he could see the surface of the canvas. It was the canvas which he had seen before; it was the portrait of Sibyl.

De Courcy was working on the face of the portrait, and as Tom looked at him his head turned again and again towards the place where the chair had stood. This was no painting from memory. A few steps more and Tom would see the sitter. This certainty

turned him sick, and for a moment he could not move; then he crept forward, all intent, into the open doorway. And now he could see the chair. It was empty. Yet he had seen the painter's head turning again and again from canvas to chair, from chair to canvas. What could he believe? Could he trust his eyes? Had they tricked him or did they trick him now? They ached with the effort to see what was not to be seen. Staring and with hands outstretched, eager to confirm by touch the verdict of his sight, he went forward stooping towards the chair. As he came near to it, and so between it and de Courcy, he heard a sharp cry behind him—a cry wrung from jarred nerves. He did not turn, for his hands were now upon the chair —the empty chair.

And now Tom turned at last to face his rival. What new devilry was this, that a man should paint his lady's portrait from an empty

chair? Furious words were on his lips, but they never passed them; for turning he looked straight into the little deadly clustered rings of a revolver. De Courcy pale from the effects of his fall, paler from unnatural absorption in his work, was staring at him with the pistol levelled at his head. Tom threw up his arm before his face, while through him flashed the great regret that here he must die in this accursed room, and see never again the pleasant light of the sun, nor hear again the music of the hounds. In an instant he would have dashed in upon his foe and chanced the shots; but suddenly de Courcy flung the pistol from him with another cry and threw himself face downward on the floor.

Relief as great as his regret possessed Tom as he saw his rival fall. He felt himself alive —alive and warm in every atom of his body. Then came amazement; for the man, who had stood erect a moment before with his

life in his hand, lay now before his feet sobbing like a girl. There at his feet in that prostrate creature was all which he longed to know. But for the pity which tempered his scorn he would have tried to shake the truth out of him; as if forsooth by brutal force or any cunning dissection can be found a truth which lies hid in the frailest of mankind. Tom could not move de Courcy's tongue, nor, if he could move it, be sure that it would not lie. He stood looking down at the slender body shaken by sobs; he felt powerless before this excess of weakness; he had not believed in the possibility of such a man. Then he began to hear broken words among the sobs, and suddenly the name of his love.

'Stop!' he cried out.

'Kill me if you will,' said de Courcy with his face still hidden. 'You tried to kill me the other day; kill me now.'

'Oh! stop that rot,' said Tom. 'I don't want to kill you. I behaved like a blackguard that day, and I ask your pardon. Get up, do.'

He helped de Courcy to his feet and into an arm-chair. The poor fellow looked white and weak; his long fingers clutched the arms of the chair, as if the world slipped from him; his eyes stared at the picture on the easel.

'For God's sake,' said Tom, 'tell me what it all means! Did she sit to you for that?'

'Once,' said de Courcy; 'she came here once with—with her companion, and sat there for a few minutes—there.' He pointed at the empty chair, and continued to gaze at it, till Tom gazing too half expected to see his lady's face.

'I can see her there now,' said de Courcy.

'What infernal'—began Tom, and stopped.

'I can see her there,' said de Courcy, 'when I choose—oh! I know what you think' (his words came more quickly)—'you think that I have some wonderful power; I have only a weakness—a wonderful weakness—that's all. I tell you that I am the weakest man alive, and the most wretched.'

'Do you love her?' asked Tom scarcely above his breath.

'With all my heart and soul,' cried out the other.

'And you are trying to marry her?'

'No. I would rather kill her.'

'Then you speak against her,' cried Tom fiercely; 'do you mean that she is not good enough for *you*?'

'Not good enough for me?' asked de Courcy with a sort of musing wonder. 'Why,' he went on, 'I never knew that good women were like that till I saw her. I was brought here, and I saw her, and I knew

what life might be—how fair and good—and I knew what my life was—a slave's life. That's why I would rather die than marry her. You can understand that? No?' His voice was full of impatience again.

'How can I understand all this?' asked Tom in return. 'Only tell me this,' he added presently; 'do you know of any danger to her?'

De Courcy looked at him for a while, and then said 'Yes.'

'What is it?'

'I can't say.'

'You won't say!' cried Tom angrily.

'I can't,' said de Courcy again; and then turning in his chair, and speaking more and more quickly, he went on: 'But I can say this; I can say to you that you are a man, and a brave man, and that if a danger threatens her you love, you should seize her and carry her away.'

'You say you love her and you tell me to do this!' cried Tom in sore amazement.

'Yes,' said de Courcy, 'for you are an honest man. I felt that from the first. I would have been your friend if you had allowed me—if I were fit to be the friend of any man. I tell you that I shall be happy, or at least not so wholly wretched, when I hear that she is your wife.'

Tom stared at this strange being, and wondered with all his power of wonder if he could believe him.

'Go to her,' said de Courcy passionately; 'plead with her, pray to her, beg her to go with you; go now; go before night; to-morrow may be too late.'

This appeal set fire to that deep longing to see her, and to see with his own eyes that all was well with her, which had tormented Tom's ardent spirit for the last days. 'But I can't even get into the house,' he said.

'Oh, you Englishmen!' said the other, as he sank back exhausted in the chair; 'if the last chance of life and love were inside the house, you would still go calling at the door with your eternal card-case and leave a card with your regrets. Break in!' he cried again with a sudden return of passion.

'You are right,' cried Tom with answering passion; 'I will see her.'

'Take that,' said de Courcy pointing to the pistol on the floor.

'No; I shan't want anything of that sort. I'll manage.' He set his teeth like a bulldog. 'And you won't tell me what threatens her?'

'I can't,' said the other again, and he wrung his hands.

'Well, I believe you,' said Tom; 'and I'll get in all right.' He hesitated awkwardly for a moment, came quickly and gripped de Courcy's hand, and hurried out of the house.

CHAPTER XIII.

WHEN Tom left the Cottage the winter day was drawing to an end. Blood was hot in the young man; and the distance was so short between cottage and house, that he had to wait awhile on the grass before he could control the beating of his heart. When he was master of himself he went forward, and he had determined what he would do. When he was near to the house he turned away from the front door and went round the corner; he crossed the stable-yard, nodding, as he went, to one of the stablemen whom he knew, and advanced with a matter-of-course air to the back door, where a maid was chatting with a young tradesman from the

town. In dealing with average men and women, if one does a strange thing as if it were commonplace, it is often accepted, for the moment at least, as commonplace. Tom passed the young housemaid in the doorway with a nod, and said, as he passed, that he had left something in the house; and the girl, after a vague stare at his back, resumed the conversation with her bashful admirer. Tom walked along the stone passage, where the gas was not yet lighted, as if he knew his way, and, as he hoped, he came upon the back-stairs; he ran up them quickly.

Tom had considered his chances. He hoped to meet Sibyl face to face, when he would know well what to say. Indeed the words came crowding to his lips, till he dreaded his own confusion and forced himself to calm. If he did not meet Sibyl, it was likely that he would see some one of the women servants near her door, and he would

send her with his matter-of-course air to tell Miss Mervyn that he must see her at once on a matter of great importance. There was one other whom he had prepared himself to meet, though he liked the prospect least, and that was Mrs. Vere. With Mrs. Vere he was ready to be curt and firm. He would not be humbugged again by her obsequious and protesting manner; he would say roundly that he had fears for the safety of the girl, whom she protected so feebly; he would claim the right to see the girl with his own eyes, and to hear from her own lips that all was well.

At the first landing on the back-stairs Tom found a door, which opened, as he expected, on to the more luxurious portion of the house. Indeed he found himself in that dignified passage from the end of which the front-stairs—a spacious and stately staircase—descended to the hall. In this passage he

had been before, and he knew which of the many doors was that of Sibyl's sitting-room. It had been the schoolroom; and he remembered that Mrs. Vere's room, which had been that of the governess, opened into it. He saw that the passage, which was somewhat less dark than that below, was empty, and treading carefully on the thick carpet he came to the door of Sibyl's sitting-room. He could hear no sound. Then he remembered that there were double doors; and then he detected, in spite of the double doors, a faint suggestion of light. She was there then.

After a minute's delay Tom put his hand carefully on the handle of the outer door; it was locked. Then it came to him there, with his hand on the door, what evil luck it was that he, an upright young Englishman, should be compelled to these creeping courses. He realised with a new shock that this was he who was stepping softly in the

dusk in his neighbour's house. A sudden sob of self-pity shook him. It was hard that in his gallant boyhood this need should come to him. All the habits of his race, of his family, of his life urged him to call aloud. He raised his hand to knock roundly on the panel, but he forced it to his side again; he was strong, and he held his peace. He was there to help—perhaps to save—Sibyl; that must be his only thought. The absolute candour which was dear to him had failed; he was there now to meet guile with guile. He would play his unwelcome part thoroughly, lest he should lose one chance of helping his love; he set his teeth and moved a-tiptoe like a conspirator.

Moving thus noiselessly Tom went to the next door in the passage, listened a moment, peered and could detect no sign of light, and finally opened the door with extreme care, just so far that he could be sure that the

room was dark. The room was dark and there was no inner door; and after another minute's listening he went in. He was now in Mrs. Vere's room, and, as he had hoped, the door between that and Sibyl's sitting-room was open; and in the latter was sufficient light. Standing in the dark he looked into that room which he, with other guests, had been allowed to see one happy day, when its maidenly familiar air had hushed his tongue and touched the finer chivalry within him. He had never forgotten the charm, sacred and homely too, which that nest of so sweet a bird had had for him; and now he saw it again. Standing unwelcome in the unfriendly darkness he looked into that lighted room, and looked upon his lady's face; and her eyes turned him, as it seemed, to ice, as if they would kill him with their awful vacancy. The eyes which he loved were wide open; but there was no thought

nor feeling in them; they stared straight towards him, and he looked as into the clear windows of an empty house. An hour ago he had looked into the muzzle of a pistol, and it was not so terrible as the girl's face.

While young Tom Fane stood there and could not move, Mrs. Vere came forward into the part of the room which he could see; and the sight of her seemed to bring him back to life, to a less intolerable wonder and fear. It was Mrs. Vere, but unlike the feeble woman whom he had known. He had known an elderly lady huddled in wraps and shawls, with her almost obsequious stoop and her air of being always in the background. Now there came stalking into the field of his vision a woman who looked a full foot taller than the bending *chaperon*. Straight, alert, and vigorous, she came slowly forward; and her close-fitting gown showed a form somewhat flat and high-shouldered, but strong

and active withal. Tom watched her with an agonised attention. He saw her advance towards the girl, slow and straight, all one embodied purpose. Then she began to speak slowly and with strong emphasis. 'To-morrow will be the day,' she said; 'to-morrow you will be married. Put the veil about your head.'

Sibyl obedient raised her lovely arms and moved her hands about her hair as if they held a bridal veil, while her eyes still looked straight before her, showing no sign of joy or grief. The grace of the girl's movement awoke in her lover the most exquisite pang of all. He shut his eyes for a minute before he could look again. And now the woman had come close to the girl and pushed her face, full of her purpose, close to that sweet innocent face.

'Rub your cheek till the colour comes,' she said; 'he will not like so white a bride.'

Submissive to the word the girl raised her hand to her cheek and began to rub it slowly.

'Look your loveliest for him,' said Mrs. Vere. 'Be beautiful for him and kind for him. Love him; love him; love him.' Her voice was more imperious with each word. 'To-morrow,' she said more slowly still and dwelling on each word, 'to-morrow you shall be wife of Gabriel de Courcy.'

Tom started as if at the cut of a whip across the face. 'Sibyl,' he cried out in pain, 'Sibyl!' and he went towards her with eager eyes; he saw no sign that she had heard his voice. Only Mrs. Vere had leapt at the sound, and as he came into the lighted room she quickly stepped between him and the girl and faced him with fierce eyes; at the same moment he felt his hand seized from behind and crushed as if the bones would break. His eyes fell on this cruel grasping

hand and it was black; and, as he shuddered from head to foot, he felt a sharp stab in his helpless palm. He reeled, and as he reeled a dull blow fell on the back of his neck; visions whirled before him, the exquisite vacant face of his dear love, the black and loathsome hand with poisoned finger-nail; with a faint moan he fell unconscious to the floor.

CHAPTER XIV.

'It's not a bad world in its way,' said old Tom Fane; 'if it wasn't more good than bad the pickpockets would be on the bench and the swindlers in the pulpits, and we should be clapped in prison for refusing to plunder the widow and orphan.'

When Mr. Fane delivered himself of this opinion, he was sitting squarely in a chair in the library of Mr. Mervyn's London house. It was his last effort to encourage Mr. Mervyn, who was sitting down and jumping up each alternate moment and repeating futile accusations against the world. His air of self-confidence and good sense was gone; he was restless, uncertain, irritable.

'It's all very well for you,' he said angrily in answer to his good friend's moralising.

It was not all very well for old Tom Fane, though he allowed the statement to pass. Not twenty-four hours before he had seen his boy, his only son, brought home unconscious; and he had left him on the morning of this day tormented by an angry fever. He had complete trust in his good friend the doctor, who had seen Tom and was hopeful about him; he had arranged for a frequent despatch of letters and telegrams, but yet it was hard to sit still and do nothing, to think of his boy tossing feverish on his bed at home and to sit there helpless and waiting. Nevertheless without a word wasted on his own anxiety he had taken the burden of his neighbour's trouble. Since he could do nothing for his boy at home and could do something for his neighbour in London, it had been obvious to old Tom Fane that to London he must go;

and, since he had found his neighbour absolutely helpless, it was obvious to him that in London he must stay.

On the morning after the bringing home of his unconscious boy, Mr. Fane, when he had seen for himself that the doctor's directions had been followed in every detail, had set out for the Cottage. He had a notion that at the Cottage he might learn something of young Tom's accident. There was something peculiar in the accident; for no mark of injury could be found but a small wound in the palm of the hand. The doctor had looked long and curiously at this angry-looking spot, and had asked Mr. Fane if his son had been anywhere where he could have been handling poisoned weapons; such a wound might have been made by the rude arrow-head of some savage tribe. So, when the doctor had paid his second visit early in the morning and had dressed the hand again and left all necessary

directions, old Tom had taken his dogcart and driven himself over to the Cottage. To his surprise he had found the Cottage empty. He had walked in without difficulty when nobody came to answer the bell; and not only was there no servant to answer questions, but de Courcy, whom he had expected to find an invalid in bed, had vanished. He explored the little garden with the same want of success, and then went up to Goring House to see if anything was known there of the movements of their mysterious tenant. At the house he found nothing but a new surprise. Early as it was, Miss Mervyn and Mrs. Vere had gone away. The servants understood that they had gone to Mr. Mervyn in London. Mr. Fane did not betray his anxiety. He went back to the road, climbed into his dog-cart and drove into the town and to the telegraph office. He sent a telegram to Mr. Mervyn, asking where Mrs. Vere was, and arranged

that the answer should be taken to the doctor's house. He then drove home, ordered that his portmanteau should be packed while another horse was put into the cart, and went softly to his son's bedside. He could hardly bear to leave the poor boy, who lay moving and muttering in his fever; but he had made up his mind that it was probable that he would be obliged to leave him. This sudden disappearance from both house and cottage disquieted him the more because he could not speak of his anxiety; he saw that silence was of the utmost importance. He pushed the short curly hair from young Tom's forehead and kissed it lightly; he sighed to feel how hot it was. Luckily his servants loved him; and he was not afraid to leave his boy in their hands and in the doctor's. He only hoped with all his heart that, when young Tom was able to ask questions, he would be able to give him a comfortable answer about

the inmates of Goring House. He knew that his boy's first rational question would be of Sibyl.

So Mr. Fane had left his son. He had driven his fresh horse into the town and straight to the doctor's house. At the doctor's house he found the answer to his telegram. 'Have heard nothing from Mrs. Vere,' Mr. Mervyn had telegraphed; 'is she not at Goring with Sibyl?' Mr. Mervyn knew nothing of their leaving home; and Mr. Fane's anxiety was doubled. He wrote a note at the doctor's desk, asking him to keep him constantly informed of Tom's progress and giving Mr. Mervyn's London address as his own till further notice. Then he drove to the station, and went with his portmanteau by the first train to London.

No more comfortable intelligence had greeted Mr. Fane in London. Mr. Mervyn, in whom the telegram had aroused only the

slightest anxiety, was overwhelmed by the news of his daughter's disappearance. He could offer no suggestion of the cause or the destination of the strange flight; and he was so incapable of action that Mr. Fane asked nothing of him but absolute silence and an appearance of decent calm. Then old Tom Fane set to work. He summoned Mr. Mervyn's own man, and told him that his master was much disturbed about Miss Sibyl's health; that she had been sent at a moment's notice to the sea with Mrs. Vere; that absolute rest was of vital importance, and that all letters for her or for Mrs. Vere were to be taken at once to Mr. Mervyn, and would be forwarded by him if necessary. He wrote to the same effect to the housekeeper at Goring House, bidding her tell anybody who inquired for Miss Mervyn that she was to be kept quite quiet for a time at the seaside, and that by the orders of the London doctor, who had sent her to the

sea, her address was to be given to nobody, as it was most important that she should receive neither visitors nor letters till her nerves were stronger. While he was doing his best for secrecy, Mr. Fane lost no time in putting the case in the hands of the most trustworthy detective whom he could find, with instructions to avoid all chance of publicity and to spare neither pains nor money. Indeed he promised a very large reward in Mr. Mervyn's well-known name, and without consulting that opulent gentleman. So Mr. Fane did all which could be done; and there was nothing left but to practise and to preach patience, to sit and wait with his friend, and to keep him as calm as he could.

They were weary hours for old Tom Fane. Talking with the clever detective he had had moments almost happy, in which he fancied himself consulting with the huntsman which cover should be drawn first; but now, as he

sat with nothing to do but to wait, his thoughts would wander back to the pleasant country air, and his eyes would turn to the dingy London sky, noting the way of the wind, which told him that it was a lovely hunting-day at home. And then each time he would remember that, if he were in his well-loved country, he would not be hunting the fox; for his poor boy was ill at home, and he would be watching by his bed. And then he would bring himself back to the place where he was, and return to the dull task of trying to preserve a decent calm in this most distressful merchant.

Mr. Mervyn, as the day waned, grew ever more restless and more trying. This thing which had happened was outside of his world of possibilities; and all the admirable sense, which had fitted him so well to cope with this world of his, was helpless before this incredible catastrophe. That his daughter, the carefully guarded child of a British merchant in this

civilised nineteenth century, should have been kidnapped! That a lady of admirable appearance and manner, and recommended by such unexceptionable references, should have kidnapped his child! He, who had had such confidence in his judgment, he had been wrong in the most important choice which he had made since his choice of a wife. Finding that he was capable of making such a mistake in a matter so important, the poor gentleman, losing in a moment all confidence in himself, lost in the same moment all confidence in everything. If so prudent, so clear-sighted a man could be so deceived, what security was there in the world? His world had slipped away from him; and he stood staring, helpless, among whirling thoughts. He sat down; he jumped up; he walked about; he could not bear Mr. Fane to leave him for a moment, and he worried him with questions, almost with reproaches. He asked if this could not be done,

or that; he found fault with his friend for making no new suggestions; he returned again and again to excuses for his misplaced confidence. No man had ever had such reasons for confidence; no woman had ever brought such letters of recommendation. He raved at the world, and he moaned over it; he pronounced it unutterably vile. His imagination, let loose from the narrow region of his experience, seemed capable of any flight. He imagined his child detained for years in fictitious Indian seas, till all his fortune had been drained from him in ransom; or married by force to a conjuror masquerading as a gentleman; or killed for hate. He was possessed by vague recollections of his boyhood's literature, which even in his decorous boyhood he had sneered at as exaggerated nonsense.

And old Tom Fane was patient in spite of all. Concerning the vileness of the world he

had uttered his soothing protest. 'It is the best we've got at present,' he said—'and more good than bad.' To the extravagant visions of possible evil he would say nothing but 'Oh no, no; not so bad as that; it'll all come right;' while to the repeated excuses he said nothing at all, having wasted no breath in useless accusations. When the merchant demanded again and again if there was nothing to be done, he answered again and again with no sign of irritation that he had done all which was possible, and that they must wait patiently for news. 'We are sure to hear soon,' he said at intervals, and was answered only by despairing groan or impatient exclamation.

As night drew down the pleasant south-west wind grew to a gale and filled poor Mr. Mervyn with visions yet more terrific. He was sure that his child had been hurried to the coast, and carried on board a fishing-boat, which was even now being broken by the storm; he

was sure of any catastrophe which his imagination, now leaving far behind its habitual narrow bounds, sought far and near with exultation. The wind whistling at the street corners and howling in the chimneys filled him with fears; and when the storm broke over the immense city, he felt as if its thunder were hurled at his head, and the lightning sent to blast him.

At last, when the storm was passing away, Mr. Fane induced his unhappy companion to go to bed, promising that he would sit up, since news might come in the night; and when he had seen him tucked up, and had heard him, after many lamentations over the impossibility of sleep, snoring heavily in his bed, he went down again to his lonely vigil by the library fire, to listen for the bell and to think of his boy. And there he sat till dawn, patient for all his fear, patient though the night passed so slowly away, and no news came with the lagging light of the girl whom his dear boy loved.

CHAPTER XV.

It was on the morning after his father's lonely watch in London that young Tom Fane at home awoke without fever. He was very weak; and he lay for a long time looking at the wall, almost too weak to think. He did not know what day it was, but he supposed that it was not early in the day, for the room was full of light. His first clear thought of himself was that it was strange that he should be lying in bed so late. What was the matter? He moved, and found himself so feeble that he smiled feebly at himself. Then he began to be tormented by an uncomfortable belief. He was sure that he ought to be giving his attention to something—that it was of vital

importance that he should attend to it at once. But he could not remember what it was which he was bound to remember. So he lay weakly trying to revive the past. Something had happened which made it necessary for him to act at once. What had happened? What was he to do?

He could not lie quiet in bed, for his failure to remember became, as life grew stronger in him, a haunting pain. A bell-rope hung within reach, and after looking at it for some time he raised himself a little and stretched his hand to it; then he fell back on to his pillow, uncertain if his feeble pull had rung the bell or no. It seemed as if a long time passed and nobody came. He could lie there no longer. He put his feet to the floor and sat a minute with his eyes shut. Then he stood up; and then he walked slowly and carefully to the door and opened it. He meant to call his father; but when the door

was open and he stood leaning on the handle, he saw on the floor something which broke the weak connection of his thoughts. He forgot his purpose looking idly down at this unusual object. It was a common little glass bottle with a cork stuck in it. Still holding the door-handle tightly, he lowered himself to his knees and picked up the bottle; and then with great difficulty, since one hand was thus occupied, he regained his feet. He shut the door and leaned his back against it while he looked at the bottle; and as he looked a great disgust filled him. It was half filled with a dirty liquid, and the only object distinctly visible in it was a drowned and bloated spider. It touched his sick memory and woke it to new strivings and ineffectual. What had he read, or seen, or heard about a dirty bottle left at a man's door? There was some horror in it, but he could not remember what. Had he dreamed of the poison of toads, of sordid

magic, of the fantastic devilries of black men? He felt sick and faint; he scrambled to the window, lifted the light sash with all the strength he had, and threw the bottle into the shrubbery.

The cold clear air seemed for a minute pleasant to the poor boy as he stood there in his nightshirt; but presently it came in with double force, for the door had been opened behind him.

'Did you ring, sir? Glad to see you up, sir. We've been very uneasy. Jane said as she thought she heard the bell.'

Tom held out one arm, and his friendly young servant came and helped him back to bed.

'Ask my father to come,' said Tom when he was once more safe on his pillow.

'Mr. Fane is out, sir.'

'Hunting?' Tom asked feebly; and then

querulously, as his attendant did not answer, 'Is he hunting?' he said.

'No, sir—not exactly,' said the simple youth with some confusion.

'Where is he?'

'Well, sir, I wasn't to say unless you asked pertic'lar.'

'Where is he?'

'In London.'

Old Tom Fane in London and on a genial hunting-day! And it was to have been kept from him! There was something the matter then. Tom thought and thought with pain, and only added to his vague uneasiness. Suddenly he seemed to see the face of Sibyl —her face, but with some strangeness in it. He wondered that his first thought had not been of her. Was she the cause of this haunting, perplexing fear? Had anything happened to her? He could not remember.

'I am hungry,' he said at last.

'Oh yes, sir,' said the simple youth beaming. 'I quite forgot. Mrs. Blunt told me to let her know the moment you were awake. She has been with you night and day since you were took ill. She only went away half-an-hour ago, and I was to be sure to tell her the very moment you woke, and she would bring you up the broth herself.'

He stood beaming in a friendly manner.

'Why don't you tell her?' asked Tom feebly.

'Yes, sir;' and he departed.

Mrs. Blunt had been Tom's nurse, and when that office was no longer necessary she had been promoted to the dignity of housekeeper. Old Tom Fane had even more confidence in her than in the doctor. She came now to the bedside of her poor boy very motherly and kind. The mere sound of her gown was comfortable; and she carried in her hands a covered basin of hot broth with

little strips of toast in its saucer. Tom pointed to the chair by his bedside; her presence had a soothing influence.

'There, my poor dear,' she said as she set the fragrant broth upon his knees.

Tom felt like a little boy again recovering from one of childhood's maladies. He remembered how pleasant it used to be to find himself of unusual importance. He smiled like a child at his old nurse, who had come, as in those distant days, to tempt his appetite.

'Now, do eat it, dear,' she said, 'while it's hot. And good it is too—as good as ever I smelt.'

Tom took the spoon with great readiness; his vague fears seemed to yield to the wholesome fragrance.

'And only to think,' said Mrs. Blunt, 'that it was made by a black woman!'

The spoon dropped with a clatter.

'There, there,' said the good old nurse, restoring the spoon to his fingers and patting up his pillows with the other hand; 'it's a good soup and you must take it, dear. It's Mr. de Courcy's cook at the Cottage made it —the same that brought you home, and a good woman, though black.'

'Brought me home?' asked Tom with sinking heart.

'Carried you all the way in her arms, as I used to carry you myself when you were a baby. It wasn't long before I had to give up carrying you—a great strong boy, and never quiet for a minute, never giving a body a rest. But there, these blacks are wonderful strong, to be sure. It's given them to make up for their complexions. And she has been here constant since; and she has been doing half the work for those idle girls. And I should have made your broth myself, as I always used when you were ill, which, thank

Heaven, was but seldom and soon over, for a stronger child I never saw—never. Now, do you take it, dear.'

She patted the patient with her motherly hand; but he lay back with closed eyes, dizzy and sick.

'It's good Christian broth, dear,' continued Mrs. Blunt, 'for I watched her make it myself; and I couldn't refuse when she had been so kind and brought you home like a baby; and there was nothing outlandish but a morsel of a little innocent herb, which she said they always used in her country, though where that is indeed I cannot say—somewhere Africa-way, I suppose, judging by her complexion. Now, dear.'

Tom pushed the broth from him; he was filled with horror. The good woman pressed it on him again, but he could not even look at it.

'Take it away,' he said; 'please—please take it away.'

Mrs. Blunt had humoured many sick fancies in her time; and so she took up the rejected broth with a sigh and a slow shake of her cap-ribbons and departed. She promised herself to tempt her boy later with a little arrowroot of her own making.

And Tom lay back fasting, incredibly light, with wide open eyes. It seemed strange to him that he had weight enough to keep him on the bed—that he did not float away somewhere. He did not know if he were waking or sleeping; only he knew that his love's face looked in upon him, now vacant, now pleading tenderly. Where had he seen her? When had he seen her? What did she want with him? He could not remember; he could scarcely think. He did not know if he had seen in a dream those eyes that haunted him with their emptiness, or if

waking he had seen them. The question tormented him. He could not tell if he were in a real world or a world of phantoms. Only from somewhere in this doubtful world the negress came again and again, growing greater as she came, black as the night through which she stumbled on her way, and hugging to her breast a lifeless hanging body which was his, though he could see it there. His eyelids fell, but he could see it still: at last kind sleep came to him and forgetfulness.

The day which was so full of discomfort for young Tom Fane was scarcely more pleasant for his father, who spent it all in Mr. Mervyn's library in London. He needed all his fine old stock of patience, which had improved so steadily with age.

He was alone, for the man whom he was trying to help refused to leave his bed.

'What is the good,' he asked pettishly, 'since you won't let me do anything?'

Mr. Fane did not say how hard he found it to do nothing. But there was nothing to be done. He had arranged with the detective that if any discovery were made news should be sent to him there by the quickest means; and so there he was forced to wait. To move or to allow the girl's father to move was only to increase the chances of an odious publicity. And yet to sit still taxed his strength indeed. His dear boy was the subject of his long thoughts; and when he turned his mind from him it busied itself unbidden with the fate of the poor girl. The girl whom his boy loved so deeply was lost and in dangerous hands, and his boy lay weak and ill and might grow worse. And yet all those long hours he must sit still or pace the room for exercise. Twice in the day he got news of Tom. In the morning came the doctor's letter, written on the previous evening, and stating briefly that the patient had fallen into a quiet sleep, and

permitting the hope that he would wake without fever. In the evening arrived a messenger from the doctor with a second letter; and Mr. Fane read that the fever had gone, but that his boy was very weak and had shown an unaccountable aversion to food. The doctor was confident of his quick amendment if only he would eat; and if he could not induce him to eat he would telegraph to Mr. Fane, who must then come down and use his influence. At last the fitful light, which, when the storm had passed away, had shone through the ragged flying clouds and gleamed again and again pale yellow on the wet streets and pavements, was slowly withdrawn, and night at last began to fill the town. At last it seemed to old Tom Fane that the longest day of his life was drawing to a close. There had been sorrows in his happy life, those common heavy sorrows which such men as he bear with the simplest heroism; but he had never

known a time of such anxiety as this, for he had always found or made for himself some task to do. Now he could only wait, absolutely idle, hoping and fearing. And now the day was done; and no news had come of the girl and very doubtful news of his dear boy.

CHAPTER XVI.

When Mr. Fane was troubled, nothing ever did him so much good as a thoroughly good wash. The hard rubbing of his honest face with a rough towel seemed always to put new courage into him. So after his long day in his friend's warm library it was a relief to him to snatch a few minutes from the departing day, to run upstairs, and to plunge his head into a basin of cold water; though, even while he was rubbing his head and face into a glow, he paused every minute lest he should miss the sound of the bell. When he had made an end of this rapid process, he went softly to Mr. Mervyn's room and assured himself that that disquieting person had fallen

again into a heavy sleep. Then he went downstairs prepared to spend the night, as he had spent the day, in the accustomed library.

As he came downstairs, he heard the bell ring; and, though he had been expecting it so long, it gave him a shock of surprise. He hurried down, and before the servant could appear from below he had opened the front door. Someone wrapped in a big fur coat was on the doorstep. 'This is Mr. Mervyn's house?' asked the stranger quickly.

'Yes; come in,' said Mr. Fane.

'I must see him at once,' said the other, as he came into the hall—'for Heaven's sake don't stand there; go and say I must see him at once; it's about——'

'Hush, and come in here,' said Mr. Fane loudly, as the servant appeared. He nodded a dismissal to the servant, shut the front door, and drew the new-comer by the arm into the

library. When he saw him in the lighted room, he looked at him for a moment, and then, 'You are Mr. de Courcy,' he said with decision.

'Yes, yes. Now call Mr. Mervyn.'

'One moment, one moment,' said the good gentleman nodding his head. 'Mervyn's asleep; and I shan't wake him till I know that there's something to wake him for; you can tell me—my name is Fane.'

'Yes, yes, I know you now; you are his father. Then I tell you I bring news of her—of Miss Mervyn. Call her father, Mr. Fane. Just think what he must be suffering!'

'He is asleep,' repeated Mr. Fane emphatically. 'I want you to tell me first. Is she safe and well?' He leaned forward and looked earnestly into the young man's face.

'Yes,' said de Courcy, 'she is safe and well, thank God.'

'Thank God!' echoed the older man with

a deeper note. 'Where is she?' he asked again.

'At Arundel.'

'Who is she with?'

'She is with—with——' And de Courcy hesitated a moment.

'With Mrs. Vere?' asked Mr. Fane.

'Yes.'

'And safe with her?' asked old Tom, with greater emphasis.

'Yes, yes, I say—ah, do let me tell her father!'

'He is asleep,' said old Tom again; 'and, when he wakes, he had better hear nothing rather than false news.'

The young man threw up his hand with a gesture of despair. 'Ah,' he cried out, 'I am the most wretched of men!' Mr. Fane went and tried the door, fearful that, if it were not tightly closed, the raised voice might be heard. 'Why should you believe

me, or why should he believe me?' continued de Courcy wildly. 'Perhaps you think that I carried her away.'

'Come, come,' said Mr. Fane, 'don't get excited, and don't talk too loud. Of all things we want it kept quiet. There! sit down and let us have a few words together. I want to believe you, you know; it is everything to us to believe you, if we can. Nobody has said that you carried her away. You were with them, I suppose?'

'Yes,' said de Courcy, whom the elder man had gently pressed into an arm-chair; 'yes, but——'

Old Tom checked him with uplifted hand. 'Why did you go?' he asked.

'Because I could not help it—because I was forced to go as much as if I had been dragged in chains. Oh, how can I make you believe me?'

'Oh, I know that men are weak,' said Mr.

Fane; 'and I want to believe you. Who forced you to go?'

The young man looked up at him with a strange expression

'Was it Mrs. Vere?' asked Mr. Fane.

'Yes,' answered the other in a low voice.

'And what did she want?' asked Mr. Fane, as honest indignation got the better of his judicial coolness. 'Why did the woman betray her trust?'

The young man started forward in his chair, but the elder again stopped him. 'I won't go into that,' he said. 'She has you in her control in some way, and at least she has repented and sent you here.'

De Courcy was about to speak eagerly, but seemed to think better of it. Old Tom Fane looked at him; and then he deliberately took the shade off the lamp and looked at him again. He made no pretence that he was not searching the face for signs of deceit.

'You tell me on your honour,' he asked, 'that the girl is safe and well?'

'Yes, yes, I swear it.'

'And she is at Arundel, and will stay there till we fetch her to-morrow?'

'Yes.'

'And you will stay with us, with her father and me, till we find her?'

'Yes,' said de Courcy with a certain eagerness; it had come to him that he would see the girl once again.

Mr. Fane looked steadily at him for a full minute more, and then, 'I believe you,' he said; 'and I'll go and fetch her father. No! I'll just ask you one more question first. Miss Mervyn has been seen by nobody who knew her?'

'By nobody.'

'They are at a hotel, or in lodgings?'

'In lodgings.'

'And what do they think at the lodgings?'

'Oh, nothing at all. It is only a young lady who has come for change with her lady companion.'

'And you?'

'They hardly saw me. I was at the inn. Oh yes, I swear to you that she is all right and that you shall hold me in your hand, till I take you to her and you find her safe and well and place her in her father's keeping. You do believe me, don't you?'

Old Tom Fane looked again into the eager face. 'Yes,' he said once more, 'I believe you. Wait here till I come back.'

Mr. Fane was absent but a short time. When he returned to the library, he stood at the door for a few minutes looking with a somewhat puzzled expression at the young man in the great arm-chair. De Courcy had unbuttoned his fur coat; and he lay back

limp, on a rich background of fur. His eyes were closed, and the pallor of his face with the extreme lassitude of his lithe body and limbs touched the heart of the elder man with pity. The weary youth opened his eyes at the shutting of the door, and moved as if he would rise, but he only raised his eyebrows instead with a faint smile and a sigh and sank back in the deep chair.

'Mervyn is very sound asleep,' said Mr. Fane. 'I'm afraid he has been taking some nasty narcotic or something. He has been much upset. There's a woman sitting in the room next to his; and I told her to let me know as soon as he wakes. You ought to have some food.'

De Courcy shook his head. 'I can't eat,' he said.

Mr. Fane said nothing, but he left the room, and presently came back with some dry biscuits and a bottle of his host's best

claret. 'And now let me help you off with your coat,' he said. 'You must be boiled.'

De Courcy with a faint smile allowed the other to help him from the chair and out of the coat. 'How good you are to me!' he said, as he sank down again and took the wine-glass from his new friend's hand; 'and yet you have reason enough—too much reason—to think me very bad.'

'Boiling won't make you better,' said old Tom sagely; 'and besides I don't believe you are very bad. It's the woman.' De Courcy looked at him with startled inquiry.

'Women are often at the bottom of mischief,' continued the man of longer experience. 'Now this woman, this Mrs. Vere —there's nothing to be said for her. She betrayed her trust.'

'Don't abuse her to me. For pity's sake don't abuse her. You won't abuse her when

you see her. I hated to speak of it—to think of it; I let you say that she sent me to you, but it was not true. She can't send anybody anywhere. She is helpless and hurt—awfully hurt—an accident.'

'The girl? Sibyl? She is not hurt?'

'No. Have I not told you enough that she is safe and well?'

'Yes. I beg your pardon. Well? And the woman?'

'She went out last night into the storm; there was a terrible storm there.'

'It was pretty bad here too,' said Mr. Fane, as the other stopped with new doubts.

'She always loved to be in a storm,' said de Courcy. 'She came out into the storm and came for me, and took me out into the empty street. There is a street there wonderfully steep, going down to the river; she would go down it, and as we went, there came a great

flash of lightning, as it seemed, upon us, and the thunder crashed straight over us, and she fell.'

'She was struck?'

'I don't know; I suppose not; there is no sign of fire. It may have been the fall. She fell on her back on the steep pavement. All I know is that she lies helpless, she who did everything. She can move neither hand nor foot.'

'Has the doctor seen her?' asked the practical Mr. Fane.

'Yes. He hopes that she will be well again some day. But it is awful to see her lie there helpless—she who had such power. I cannot bear it. And *she* is with her, and nurses her and cares for her as an angel would, she who——' He stopped as if he could say no more, and old Tom Fane wagged his head again and said that the girl was a good girl.

'She is an angel,' said de Courcy, 'an angel of pity.'

'Well, well,' said old Tom with a soothing manner: 'but don't waste your feelings on the other woman. If she is helpless, she can do no more mischief. She is a bad woman.'

'Don't, don't,' cried out de Courcy; 'think what has happened to her.'

'That doesn't alter right and wrong,' said Mr. Fane sturdily. 'She has betrayed her trust and caused most bitter misery. She'll have to answer for it.'

'It was for me,' cried out de Courcy again.

'For you?'

'Yes, for my sake. If you won't spare her because she lies helpless, spare her for my sake; she did all for my sake.' In his excitement he caught hold of old Tom's arms and held them tight. 'Spare her,' he cried.

'Why, what in the world is the woman

to you?' asked Mr. Fane with some displeasure, and trying to free his arms from the young man's convulsive grip.

'She is my mother,' said Gabriel falling on his knees.

CHAPTER XVII.

When old Tom Fane heard from the lips of Gabriel de Courcy that he was the son of Mrs. Vere, he stood staring for a while and at last expressed his feelings, as he had not expressed them since his boyhood's days, in a long whistle. Gabriel on his side seemed to have expended his last remnant of strength in avowing his relationship. He had stumbled to his feet, and he now sank down again into his chair as if he would move no more. His whole air seemed to say that he could do no more; and his large eyes watched the other's face with only a faint curiosity. All was said now; and surely his poor mother would be spared.

Slowly did Mr. Fane review the events by this new light. He was not a quick thinker. He stood there with a slight frown on his honest brow. There had been a plot; and at last it seemed clear to him what the plot had been. A wily woman had gained the charge of the only child of a rich man, that she might marry her to her son. She had behaved uncommonly badly—and the son? Mr. Fane was exceedingly annoyed; the frown deepened and deepened. Since he had given the poor youth food and wine, his old heart had been growing softer and softer to him. He found it hard to condemn him; and yet he found it hard not to condemn him. His share in the plot looked black enough. He had hidden his relationship; he had changed his name; he had come into their good neighbourhood under false colours. It was clear enough that he had come to marry the girl. Then he had

vanished with her and with this mother of his. All this looked very black indeed. On the other hand, he had left the women at Arundel, and had come here to tell Mr. Mervyn where they were; and here he was, here under Mr. Fane's perplexed looks; and the good gentleman found it very hard to regard him as a villain. 'Well, I give it up,' said old Tom at last, and he turned away from the prostrate youth with a great heave of his shoulders. He stood for a time looking into the fire, and then he turned once more to de Courcy and said, 'Look here! why don't you tell me all about it?'

'Will you let me tell you?' asked Gabriel eagerly. 'I should like to make you understand, and you would forgive me then, and perhaps you would forgive her too. You will not try to hurt her?' The last question came in quite a different tone, as it flashed again upon the young man that un-

known mysterious engines of the law or of private vengeance might be directed against Mrs. Vere.

'You may make yourself easy about that,' said Mr. Fane. 'When we have Sibyl safe and sound, we shall drop the matter, if only for the sake of privacy. I promise that for Mervyn.'

'Thank you,' said de Courcy with all his heart. Presently he spoke again. 'Will you really let me tell you all about my mother and me? I have never had a friend whom I could trust.'

This simple statement seemed equally amazing and pathetic to the older man. 'You may trust me,' he said earnestly. 'I have my faults, but I am not a babbler.'

'You are wonderfully good,' said Gabriel, looking at him with eyes so full of reverence that he blushed and moved uneasily under the gaze. 'You will see that she has done

everything for my sake,' he added in a moment.

It was an uncommon tale which Gabriel had to tell. His earliest recollection of himself was of a little sickly boy clad in a shirt and little else and wandering in big bare rooms, where the glare of outer light was tempered to a pleasant melancholy. The moments which he remembered most vividly were moments of headache, and how he would lie waiting for his mother to come and take the pains away. He never had long to wait, for his mother would come softly and quickly and bend over him and play softly on his aching forehead with her finger tips, and presently the pain would go. 'I never,' said Gabriel, whose animation grew as he spoke, 'I never see a woman playing delicately on a piano, that I do not feel my mother's finger-tips upon my forehead. My mother was everything to me. Our home

was in the midst of a lonely plantation, and wé saw no one but negroes only. I thought that all the world were black but my mother and I.

'There were books in the house, but I was not taught to read. I saw my mother read and thought that it was only she who could read books. But she taught me verses and told me stories; and verses and stories were all of fairies and strange creatures, who, as she told me, belonged to another world which I should never see. Our world was there about the house, and my mother was its queen. I ran about after her like a little faithful dog; she was always kind, and I was always obedient. As I called for her to take away my pains, so I went to her that she might tell me what to do. She never spoke to me of duties nor of God. My duty was to do her will; it was she whom I worshipped.'

Old Tom Fane gave a great grunt of dissatisfaction. 'What a bringing up!' he said.

'She meant well for me then and always,' cried out Gabriel; 'I am sure of that. My poor mother! And I was very happy; you must remember that. As I grew older, I grew stronger, healthier, happier. But yet it never occurred to me to doubt her wisdom or to dispute her will. She kept always the old control. When I was in pain, she took the pain from me; when I was sleepless in the heat, she came and with a few movements of her beautiful hands she gave me sleep. This was no surprise to me; it seemed merely natural. Sometimes she would throw me into a trance and send me to fetch something; and then she would wake me and show me the thing in my hand. It was a pleasant game of which we never tired; and we amused ourselves by noting the growth of

her power over me—from what distance she could bring me to her—how far I could travel in my trance not knowing that I had moved at all. When my mother did not want me I was happy still. I rode; I sailed or paddled on the sea; I loved my horses and my canoes; but I loved best to paint. She had taught me to draw and paint, and told me to use my leisure so. I obeyed her in that as in all things; waking or sleeping I obeyed her without a question, as naturally as I breathed the air. And I was very happy. I had no doubts then, no doubts and wretched questioning. I was strong, active, and happy; riding, boating, and swimming, and trying to copy that enchanted world. I know that it was I, and only a few years ago; and yet it seems as if it could not be. I could imagine no greater happiness. Now I know that in this world full of miseries there is a happiness far greater than

mine was then. I know now what happiness might be, and that it will never be mine.'

'My poor boy,' said Mr. Fane, 'you were very hardly used.'

'She meant it for the best,' said Gabriel; 'and I—I did not know that I was a slave.' He went on rapidly with his story, fearful lest he should not finish it. He said that when he was almost a man in years his mother had told him simply that they were going away. He had left his home without a question and had followed her on board ship; and they had gone to Paris.

'That was rather a sudden change,' remarked Mr. Fane.

'Oh, yes, it was a change,' said Gabriel; 'there were white faces instead of black, and movement instead of calm. There were a million things to see, and I was enchanted with the show. But I had not much time for such amusements, for she set me to work

at once as I had never worked before. There was a painter, one of the best, who took only a few pupils, and she placed me in his studio. At first I could not understand a word of what was said around me; I sat drawing and painting, and now and then my master nodded or took the brush from my fingers and touched my work. Gradually I began to understand a few words, but all about my art; I could follow my master's comments, and that was all. So too I could comprehend the directions of my fencing-master, who came to me at our apartment, and of the dancing master. I was amused; I was enchanted. I loved my work more and more; and I became skilful with the foils and with my feet. And in my times of rest my mother was, as always, my companion, my delightful companion. She was so good; she asked for no companion but me.'

'And you?' asked old Tom curiously; 'did you never want any other companion?'

'No,' said Gabriel; 'I never thought of it.' He looked up at his new friend with a child-like questioning gaze; but Mr. Fane made no comment. Perhaps it was in answer to an unspoken comment that the young man went on to enumerate some of the amusements which his mother had given to him. She had shown him picture-galleries, and palaces, the varied crowd of the Boulevards, the gay people in the Bois—the brilliant spectacle of all Paris. To work hard at an engrossing task, to gain fascinating accomplishments, and to have each hour of rest filled with some vivid spectacle, surely this was a life sufficient for a boy who had no care nor anxiety in the world.

'And in this passing crowd of yours,' said Mr. Fane looking intently at the youth,

'did you never see anybody whom you wished to know better—to make a friend?'

'I think not,' said Gabriel, after a minute's thought; 'I suppose it is strange; it seems strange to me now, when you ask it. I suppose that I never thought of it as possible. You see that always from the first she and I had been together with nobody else, and she had always shown me everything. To be with her and to look where she pointed and to be content—that had been my life. She had taught me from the first to see the world as a painter—colours that were right together or were not right. And since I had worked in Paris the habit had grown on me. Landscape was my special work, and I think that the passing people were not much more to me than notes of colour which came to vary the harmonies of the sky and grass and trees.'

Old Tom Fane rubbed his hair and

coughed and hunched his shoulders, all signs of shyness with him. 'And the women?' he asked gruffly: 'were they only what you call notes of colour?'

'That is all, I think,' answered Gabriel.

'You never had any curiosity about them, any special pleasure in looking at them?'

'I delighted in looking at them.'

'Yes, but had you no wish to speak to any one of them—no fancies, as they say—no touch of what people call love, eh?'

'No, no, no,' cried out Gabriel indignant. 'Did I not tell you—or did I tell you? I don't know—that I never knew what love was till I saw her, this angel, this Sibyl whom I love, and love, and shall love till I die.'

'Then you really do love her?' said old Tom Fane after a pause; and to this question, if question it were, Gabriel returned no answer.

CHAPTER XVIII.

GABRIEL had come to the last part of his story, and to that which was the strangest to his hearer. In distant islands, where the men were black, strange beings might be born and strangely reared. Even in Paris the old-fashioned English mind of old Tom Fane suspected a proper field for mysteries. There was something naturally uncanny about a Frenchman. But it seemed almost incredible that in his own neighbourhood, where he had hunted, man and boy, for so many years, where all was so plain and obvious, and where even the wickedness appeared year after year in precisely the same forms—it seemed incredible that this strange thing, of which he now

heard, had happened there. Nevertheless, though Mr. Fane had lived a simple life at home, he was wise enough, and he had lived long enough to know that there are strange events in this little world. So, though he shook his head a good deal as if to keep it clear, he listened and he believed.

The rest of the story which Gabriel told that night was this. With no more warning than he had received when carried from his West Indian home to Paris, he had been transported by his mother from France to England. He had learned then for the first time that Mrs. Vere, though her parents had been poor, was connected with influential people. Of these people there were some who now received her with courtesy and kindness, remembered her and her story, and were quite ready to recommend her as a suitable companion for the daughter of Mr. Mervyn. This was the position which she sought; and for this

her manners, her appearance, and her obvious accomplishments were her best recommendation. The relations who both wrote and spoke of her to Mr. Mervyn had heard nothing but good of her, though it is certain that news of her for many years past had been intermittent. Still they remembered distinctly, when she reminded them, that she had married a man who had large estates in the West Indies, and that he had died soon after the marriage and left everything to her. At first she had had plenty of money; but the cheapness of sugar combined with local causes had decreased with alarming quickness the value of her property. At last she had been obliged to sell the estates, and after the sale she had found herself so poor that she was eager to find a place as companion. This was the tale which she had told to her relations, and in due course to Mr. Mervyn; but neither to the relations nor to Mr. Mervyn

did she mention the fact that she had a son.

While Mrs. Vere was securing the situation for herself, she had carefully taught to Gabriel the part which he was to play.

'And you had no doubts yet?' asked Mr. Fane, when Gabriel had reached this part of his story. 'It seemed to you right and good to go under a false name, and try to win a girl with money?'

'You can't imagine that,' said Gabriel in answer. 'I can hardly imagine it now. A few months have gone, and I have learned all things in those few months. But it cannot be that I had a doubt. I remember that I enjoyed playing the part; that I was full of excitement; that I was enchanted by the idea of receiving from my mother's hand a young and beautiful wife. My mother had given me everything; and now she promised me this new delightful thing. She told me

that it was right that I should be married now; and that if I followed her instructions and forgot no detail, she would give me the fairest and most loving wife in England. Those were her words, and they enchanted me. But if I had hated the thought of this fair unknown wife, I should have obeyed my mother; it had not yet struck me that it was possible for me to disobey her. I remembered every detail of conduct which she taught me; and it was agreed between us that, if I needed any fresh instructions, I was to send my negro nurse to her. My nurse had been with me since my birth, and she was devoted to us both. And so the time came, and my mother was at the house and I at the Cottage.' He shuddered as he spoke of the Cottage, for indeed he had suffered there. He went on to say that Mrs. Vere had gained at once an extraordinary physical power over Sibyl Mervyn. It had grown from day to day with

surprising rapidity, until from another room she could arrest her feet and forbid her to move, or bring her hurrying to her from any part of the garden. So she had stopped Sibyl from going to the ball, where she was to meet young Tom Fane; and so on another occasion, when the same eager suitor met his love on the garden path, she had drawn her from him to herself so quickly that he had not a word or look for his comfort. She had lulled her to unnatural sleep whenever she wished; and she had sent her all unconscious on such errands as she chose.

'You look,' cried out Gabriel, breaking the current of his story, 'as if it were some awful wickedness. For God's sake believe me when I say that she meant her no harm. She thought that she could mould her to her will and make her happy, as she thought that she would make me happy. She was wrong, utterly, horribly wrong—I know it now—

but it is she who suffers, she and I; you must remember that.'

'She sent the girl to the Cottage, when the girl did not know where she was going?' asked Mr. Fane, to whom a thought had come.

'She was at the Cottage twice,' said Gabriel forcing himself to speak quietly and impressively, eager to be fully believed. 'She came once with my mother in the afternoon. They brought a message from Mr. Mervyn; and, as she sat for a minute in my studio chair, my mother lulled her to a trance, and I began to paint the picture, which I nearly finished later, though she never came again.'

'You said that she came twice,' said old Tom curtly.

'Yes,' said Gabriel; 'she came once more. It was dusk, and I was sitting lonely and wretched in my room; and she came

like a spirit, holding a flower in her hand; and she gave the flower to me and went away.'

'Tom saw her,' said Mr. Fane, 'as she came from the Cottage garden.'

'He saw her!' said Gabriel. 'Oh, what ill-fortune! But he did not think—he could not believe—surely he could not have a moment's doubt of her.' He spoke, as of a saint, with adoration.

'He has been much perplexed,' said Mr. Fane; 'but I don't think that he ever lost his faith in her. He has a great faith in her, and a great love for her.'

Gabriel buried his face in his hands.

'But tell me,' said Mr Fane more sternly: 'what did Mrs. Vere mean by sending her there, helpless and unconscious, to you?'

'It was because I had rebelled against her—because for the first time in my life I was trying to disobey. And so she sent that

vision to me to show me what I was so eager to put from me.'

'Oh, at last you did rebel—and yet you loved the girl.'

'Loved her! In the first hour in which I saw her face I learned what love was, and I loved her. It is not much to say now that I would die for her. But I never had any hope. I could not believe that she was not far above me. I have never seen in her eyes any look but of kindness to a stranger, and a sort of pity, as if she guessed that I was the most luckless of men. And very soon I saw in those same eyes that she loved your son.'

'I think she cared for Tom,' said Mr. Fane.

'And it was not only that,' said Gabriel quickly; 'for, when I began to love her, I began to see myself, how utterly unworthy. I woke and found myself in the middle of a vile plot. I looked at her and knew that I

was there to ensnare this one of God's creatures, of whose possibility I had never dreamed. I believed in God at last. I knew that I was entangled in a miserable wickedness; I begged for freedom that I might tell the truth, though I lost my last chance of happiness. My mother was amazed at my resistance, though it was weak enough. For the first time I realised my own weakness with shame. I was most miserable; but sometimes I was seized by a sort of gaiety as if my old gay humour had come back with madness. It was for that and for some mad words of mine that your son tried to kill me. He was right. I was not fit to live. I could not go away; I could not speak a word; and every day I knew that she, whom I adored as something too holy for my thoughts, was being drawn and drawn away by arts, which seemed to me now base, earthly, devilish.'

'And did this—did Mrs. Vere suppose,'

asked old Tom Fane indignant, 'that with this hocus-pocus mesmerism and stuff she could subdue the soul?'

'She thought of me,' he answered. 'There was I, soul and body, at her bidding, conscious or unconscious. There was I—was I not proof enough? She was confident of her power; she did not believe in failure.'

'And yet she failed?'

'Yes.'

Mr. Fane was silent for a few minutes, thinking; and then with a final shake of the head he turned squarely to Gabriel and addressed him with deliberation and decision.

'Don't you see, my poor boy,' he said, 'that the two things are wholly different? There is this magnetism, or whatever the trick is, and it puts you to sleep and moves you about like a machine; and you are no more responsible for your actions than a

sleep-walker or a machine. That is one thing; and can't you see that that has no power whatever on anyone who is awake and alive and knowing his actions? When you are alive and awake and know what you are about, you are a responsible human creature; and if a responsible human creature could be made to do this or that by the waving of hands and such like tomfoolery, this world would be too vile to hang together. Who would live in such a place? It was not by such hocus-pocus that you were made obedient. It was the other thing which did for you. Don't you see that she began, as soon as your eyes were open, to teach you obedience, obedience, obedience, and nothing else. As you told me yourself, your whole duty, your whole religion, your whole life was obedience to a fellow-mortal. I never heard of such a thing in my life. She tried her best to take from you the best thing that

a man has—his will, his responsibility to man and to God. You were badly used, my poor boy. But none of that was done by trumpery conjuring tricks. It was an awful education of you from your birth, carried on day after day when you were awake and sensible. It was wicked; it was terribly strong; but even with you it failed as soon as she wanted you to do something which offended your whole nature. Thank God, it's bound to fail.'

Gabriel listened with amazement to the growing vehemence of old Tom Fane. He did not fully understand his emphatic assertions, but he felt that he was right.

'As for the girl,' said Mr. Fane again, 'as for this good innocent girl, it was monstrous to hope that she could even begin to succeed with her. I am certain that she never began to succeed.'

'Never,' said Gabriel; 'but she could not

believe that she had failed. She was sure that she could influence her more in another place; she told me that she would take her away in a trance, and that I must come too; I refused, and she laughed. She knew how weak I was, and I knew it too; and so I appealed to your son. I told him that she whom he loved was in danger; I begged him to save her.'

'And what did he do?' asked Mr. Fane eagerly.

'He promised to save her; he left me; and I have not seen or heard of him since. Late that night they came to the Cottage, my mother and the nurse and she; she was unconscious. The black woman was to stay behind; she drew too many eyes; but I was to go—and I went.'

'And now you have come here,' said old Tom Fane, with good encouragement. 'You have done the right thing, and I thank

you — and her father shall thank you too.'

It was late when Mr. Fane led Gabriel to a bedroom; and, as Mr. Mervyn was still sleeping heavily, they did not tell him till the next morning that his child was found. On the next morning too, before they started to Arundel, old Tom received good news of his son. 'He is taking food well,' the doctor wrote, 'and gaining strength every hour. He rather frightened me at first by begging me to send away the black woman; but I found on inquiry that there really had been a negress in the house. I was saved the ungracious task of turning her out, for she had vanished. The servant girls smelt sulphur. Later in the day I went to de Courcy's Cottage, but found not a human being, black or otherwise—only a spiteful black cat, who put up his back, and before whom I promptly retreated.'

CHAPTER XIX.

More than a year had gone since Sibyl Mervyn was brought home from Arundel. It was full summer and afternoon, and old Tom Fane had come near to sleep while Mr. Mervyn addressed to him the most sensible observations on things in general. Mr. Mervyn had acquired a habit of delivering addresses to his good friend and neighbour; for the truth is that he could never forget that this good friend and neighbour had seen him in the hours of his greatest weakness, and this disturbing recollection increased the pompousness of his demeanour and the dogmatism of his utterances. It seemed as if he felt that to old Tom Fane of all men in the

world he must insist on the reality and genuine quality of his admirable good sense. And so Mr. Fane, who was patience itself, had listened long and suppressed many yawns on this drowsy summer day. He had an idea that the one drop of wholesome bitter in his boy's cup of happiness would be the admirable good sense of his father-in-law. He found a little comfort in this thought, for even he had his own superstition, and was suspicious of a human lot in which no shadow was visible. And young Tom Fane was so exuberantly glad, and his prospects were so dangerously fair, that his father, who in an earlier and simpler age would have broken his favourite hunting-crop to avert the coming Ate, found comfort in the unfailing store of practical wisdom and its prompt and daily delivery by the estimable merchant.

Nevertheless it was with a sigh of relief that Mr. Fane becoming suddenly wide awake

yielded himself to his boy, who came in like a breath of fresh air from the garden and insisted that his father should come with him and see the improvements in the grounds of Goring House. 'Yes, yes,' said Mr. Mervyn; 'go; go by all means. Tom will show you what I have done, and I think that you will see my idea.' He looked upon the two Fanes with a superior kindly smile and turned to his writing-table, as a sensible man turns from agreeable trifling to serious and important subjects.

Young Tom Fane thrust his hand through his father's arm and led him away across the close-cropped sun-steeped lawn and down the shrubbery paths, till he brought him to the place where the wall of the Cottage garden had stood. 'There!' said young Tom, 'that's what I call an improvement.'

Old Tom looked with amazement. Not a trace of the wall remained, not the faintest

inequality of ground to show where the wall had been. The little cheerless garden of the Cottage had vanished with its wall; the Cottage had vanished with its garden. Over all that space of ground, where cottage and garden had been, the paths and shrubberies of Goring House ran in due order and without a break. The larger domain had swallowed the smaller, and scarcely looked the larger for the meal. Even the landscape gardener, who had made the change, would have been puzzled to trace the old boundary and to restore the former state. Even that part of the wall which had screened the Cottage garden from the road had become exactly like the rest of the boundary wall of the grounds of Goring House, and the door into the road had disappeared.

'It is a good job,' said old Tom Fane when he had looked his fill.

'Yes,' said young Tom, 'I am rather

proud of it; it was my idea. He thinks he thought of it,' he added in a moment with a nod towards the house, 'and it don't matter.'

'Not a bit,' said old Tom; 'never interfere with harmless delusions which give pleasure.' They stood together for a little while looking with frank enjoyment at this good change. 'The whole thing is gone,' said young Tom, 'clean gone out of the country and out of her life. It's as if it had never been.'

Old Tom Fane thought to himself that nothing can be so 'clean gone' as that, but he said nothing. Presently however, as they turned away, he said that he had received another letter from Gabriel Vere. He felt the hand within his arm give an impatient movement; and then young Tom laughed, but not quite naturally. 'I hope his writing's improved,' he said carelessly.

Mr. Fane had learned from the first letter,

which he had received from Gabriel (he had learned it both from its appearance and from the writer's apologies), that writing was a new accomplishment of his strange correspondent. Gabriel had never had need of writing a letter until he had applied for a lease of Mr. Mervyn's cottage; and the few letters which related to that business had been written for him by his mother with a bold masculine style. Now he had been learning to write; and his letters to Mr. Fane were very clearly written in a large innocent schoolboy hand, with a peculiar look in places as if he painted with his pen.

'How is he?' asked young Tom shortly and rather grudgingly, for indeed he had tried to repress his curiosity and to ask nothing.

'Quite well and happier,' said his father with decision. He added presently with less satisfaction: 'His friend, the priest, has shown

him, as he says, the true fount of consolation.'

'I thought he'd get under the thumb of his papistical friend,' said young Tom Fane; 'he's bound to be under some thumb or other.'

'Well, I am glad that he is happier, poor boy,' said old Tom.

'Does he say anything about that woman?' asked his son, when they had strolled a little further in silence.

'He says that his mother is better—that she can move about almost as well as ever. It seems that she too listens to his friend the priest. Gabriel says that it is his great hope that she too will embrace the Roman Catholic faith.'

Young Tom gave utterance to an impatient 'pish.'

'He says a strange thing too about his mother,' said old Tom meditatively. 'I would not mention it to anybody but you. I told

you that he wrote in his last letter that she had never tried her old tricks (that wasn't as he put it), nor spoken a word about them. Well, he tells me a strange thing in this letter. I tell it you because you are the same as myself.'

'Of course,' said his son: 'what is it?'

'Well, he tells me that one day, when he was bending over her, he felt her try her power on him, and that for a moment he could not speak nor lift his eyes from hers; but that a moment later he resisted the influence without trouble; and that then she began to cry quietly and kissed him, and so fell asleep. Since that day she has leaned more and more on him, until she seems to trust to him for almost everything; and he thinks that she is happier; and he has been able to lead her more and more towards his new faith. Poor boy! I can't help loving him.'

It was not often that old Tom Fane surprised his son; but young Tom now looked at him with genuine surprise at the warmth of his expression. The truth is that very many years before, in his Eton days, old Tom had had a great love and admiration, such as is not uncommon in grave, quiet, tender-hearted boys, for a school-fellow younger than himself, far more brilliant clever and attractive, and not half such a good fellow. To this schoolboy friendship, which slips from many men like water from a duck's back, old Tom had held with a loyalty all his own. For years he had insisted on looking up to his clever friend, though he had been privileged to help him again and again and to lend him many sums of money; and, when even he could no longer deny that the brilliancy had grown dim and the cleverness would never come to fruit, he had helped him the more on account of his weakness, till at last

he had stood alone by his grave. All this belonged to a time before young Tom was born; and of it no outward sign remained for him but a print which hung over his father's washing-stand, and which represented to his youthful critical gaze a silly simpering youth with absurd Byronic collars. No other sign remained of this romantic friendship; but yet the brilliancy and weakness of Gabriel Vere had touched old Tom Fane where old memories lived still and kept him tender. He had found a deeper pleasure in helping this unhappy lad than he had felt in helping other and more deserving persons, and it had come naturally to his lips to say that he could not help loving him.

'He wouldn't have been a bad chap if he'd been to a public school,' said young Tom Fane producing his panacea.

'He is not a bad chap as it is,' said old

Tom Fane mildly, 'and he had a very pretty seat on a horse too—in its way.'

The question of Gabriel's horsemanship brought thoughts to young Tom which kept him silent. Presently he asked shortly, and looking away as if the western sky had suddenly claimed his best attention, 'Did he say anything about Sibyl?'

'Not directly,' said his father. 'He asked me to wish you all happiness, and he said that it must be yours without his wishes. You wouldn't like her to write him a line?'

'Not at all,' said young Tom gruffly.

'Perhaps you are right,' said his father. 'She does seem quite strong and well now, doesn't she?'

'Yes, thank God,' said the son. 'I sometimes feel,' he added, 'as if I ought to go over and strangle that woman.'

'You would be hung,' said old Tom, 'and

Sibyl would have another shock. Let well alone. All the old copy-book things are true. Besides, I am not sure that Mrs. Vere did not do you a kindness.'

'What?' cried out his son with indignation.

'She made you really love the girl.'

'What do you mean?' asked young Tom. 'Why, I always loved Sibyl. I loved her the first hour I saw her. I never cared a moment for any one but her.'

'Well, well,' said old Tom Fane, 'you love her, and that's enough; and I think it will last.'

'Of course,' said his son.

Father and son had come out upon the wide lawn, and far away, where the chairs were placed under a spreading tree, was Sibyl. She did not see them coming, so intent was she on the fine piece of work which she was making. Old Tom Fane felt

his son's hand tighten on his arm till he almost hurt him.

'Father,' said Tom almost fiercely, 'I am not half good enough for her. I wish to Heaven it had been I who saved her.'

'You did your best,' said old Tom Fane. 'Man can't do more.'

'I can't bear,' said young Tom, 'to think of myself creeping and crawling about in people's houses, and all for no good.'

His father laughed. 'Don't think of it then,' he said. 'It was not a time for standing on ceremony. If a girl is drowning, you may try to pull her out without an introduction. I hope you will never have anything heavier on your conscience. Go to her, go, and she will charm away your foolish thoughts.' He gave a friendly push to his boy's shoulder; but 'You come too,' said Tom, and he drew his father with him across the lawn. Regrets passed away from the gallant young lover as

he drew near to his lady; his heart was full of zeal and of unspoken vows of constancy to the girl who was so delicate and fair and good. He was an honest and ardent lover indeed, and with some touch of a less common chivalry; but yet the finer appreciation of the girl's fine charm was that of the older man. 'Go to her,' said old Tom Fane, disengaging himself from his son's compelling arm, 'go to her; and I will go and talk to her father.'

CHRISTIAN REID'S NOVELS.

"The author has wrought with care and with a good ethical and artistic purpose; and these are the essential needs in the building up of an American literature."

VALERIE AYLMER. 8vo. Paper, 75 cents; cloth, $1.25.

MORTON HOUSE. 8vo. Paper, 75 cents; cloth, $1.25.

MABEL LEE. 8vo. Paper, 75 cents; cloth, $1.25.

EBB-TIDE. 8vo. Paper, 75 cents; cloth, $1.25.

NINA'S ATONEMENT, etc. 8vo. Paper, 75 cents; cloth, $1.25.

A DAUGHTER OF BOHEMIA. 8vo. Paper, 75 cents; cloth, $1.25.

BONNY KATE. 8vo. Paper, 75 cents; cloth, $1.25.

AFTER MANY DAYS. 8vo. Paper, 75 cents; cloth, $1.25.

THE LAND OF THE SKY. 8vo. Paper, 75 cents; cloth, $1.25.

HEARTS AND HANDS. 8vo. Paper, 50 cents.

A GENTLE BELLE. 8vo. Paper, 50 cents.

A QUESTION OF HONOR. 12mo. Cloth, $1.25.

HEART OF STEEL. 12mo. Cloth, $1.25.

ROSLYN'S FORTUNE. 12mo. Paper, 50 cents; cloth, $1.25.

A SUMMER IDYL. 18mo. Paper, 30 cents; cloth, 60 cents.

MISS CHURCHILL. 12mo. Paper, 50 cents; cloth, $1.00.

JULIAN HAWTHORNE'S NOVELS.

BRESSANT. 8vo. Paper, 50 cents.

GARTH. 8vo. Paper, 50 cents; cloth, $1.25.

SEBASTIAN STROME. 8vo. Paper, 75 cents.

NOBLE BLOOD. 16mo. Paper, 50 cents.

MRS. GAINSBOROUGH'S DIAMONDS. 16mo. Paper, 25 cents.

New York: D. APPLETON & CO., 1, 3, & 5 Bond Street.

D. APPLETON & CO.'S PUBLICATIONS.

CAPTAIN MARRYAT'S (R. N.) NOVELS.

PETER SIMPLE. 12mo. Paper, 50 cents; cloth, $1.25.

JACOB FAITHFUL. 12mo. Paper, 50 cents; cloth, $1.25.

NAVAL OFFICER. 12mo. Paper, 50 cents; cloth, $1.25.

KING'S OWN. 12mo. Paper, 50 cents; cloth, $1.25.

JAPHET IN SEARCH OF A FATHER. 12mo. Paper, 50 cents; cloth, $1.25.

NEWTON FORSTER. 12mo. Paper, 50 cents; cloth, $1.25.

MIDSHIPMAN EASY. 12mo. Paper, 50 cents; cloth, $1.25.

PACHA OF MANY TALES. 12mo. Paper, 50 cents; cloth, $1.25.

THE POACHER. 12mo. Paper, 50 cents; cloth, $1.25.

THE PHANTOM SHIP. 12mo. Paper, 50 cents; cloth, $1.25.

SNARLEYOW. 12mo. Paper, 50 cents; cloth, $1.25.

PERCIVAL KEENE. 12mo. Paper, 50 cents; cloth, $1.25.

*** Per set, twelve volumes, in box, cloth, $15.00.

FLORENCE MARRYAT'S NOVELS.

THE POISON OF ASPS. 8vo. Paper, 30 cents.

NO INTENTIONS. 8vo. Paper, 75 cents.

MY OWN CHILD. 8vo. Paper, 75 cents.

DR. WILLIAM A. HAMMOND'S NOVELS.

LAL. 12mo. Cloth, $1.50.

DOCTOR GRATTAN. 12mo. Cloth, $1.50.

MR. OLDMIXON. 12mo. Cloth, $1.50.

A STRONG-MINDED WOMAN. 12mo. Cloth, $1.50.

ON THE SUSQUEHANNA. 12mo. Cloth, $1.50.

New York: D. APPLETON & CO., 1, 3, & 5 Bond Street.

GRACE AGUILAR'S NOVELS.

HOME INFLUENCE. A Tale for Mothers and Daughters.
THE MOTHER'S RECOMPENSE. A Sequel to Home Influence.
THE DAYS OF BRUCE. A Story from Scottish History.
HOME SCENES AND HEART STUDIES.
WOMAN'S FRIENDSHIP. A Story of Domestic Life.
THE WOMEN OF ISRAEL. Characters and Sketches from the Holy Scriptures.
THE VALE OF CEDARS; or, The Martyr.

*** Each volume illustrated. Complete set, 7 volumes, 12mo, in box, cloth, $7.00; or separately, $1.00 each.

ELIZABETH M. SEWELL'S TALES AND STORIES.

AMY HERBERT. 12mo. Cloth, $1.00.
CLEVE HALL. 12mo. Cloth, $1.00.
THE EARL'S DAUGHTER. 12mo. Cloth, $1.00.
EXPERIENCE OF LIFE. 12mo. Cloth, $1.00.
GERTRUDE. 12mo. Cloth, $1.00.
IVORS. A Story of English Country Life. 12mo. Cloth, $1.00.
KATHARINE ASHTON. 12mo. Cloth, $1.00.
MARGARET PERCIVAL. 12mo. Cloth, $1.00.
URSULA. A Tale of Country Life. 12mo. Cloth, $1.00.
LANETON PARSONAGE. 12mo. Cloth, $1.00.

*** Per set in box, $10.00.

MARIA J. McINTOSH'S TALES AND STORIES.

AUNT KITTY'S TALES. 12mo. Cloth, $1.00.
CHARMS AND COUNTER-CHARMS. 12mo. Cloth, $1.00.
TWO PICTURES; or, How We See Ourselves, and How the World Sees Us. 12mo. Cloth, $1.00.
EVENINGS AT DONALDSON MANOR. 12mo. Cloth, $1.00.
TWO LIVES; or, To Seem and To Be. 12mo. Cloth, $1.00.
THE LOFTY AND LOWLY.

*** Per set in box, cloth, $6.00.

New York: D. APPLETON & CO., 1, 3, & 5 Bond Street.

LOUISA MÜHLBACH'S HISTORICAL NOVELS.

"We have on several occasions, in noticing the works of the great German authoress, Miss Mühlbach, expressed our admiration of them, but are now, after much careful reading of each volume as it has come from the press, almost constrained to pronounce them matchless; unrivaled in the whole domain of historical romance."—*Chicago Journal of Commerce.*

NAPOLEON AND THE QUEEN OF PRUSSIA. Illustrated. 8vo. Cloth, $1.00.

THE EMPRESS JOSEPHINE. Illustrated. 8vo. Cloth, $1.00.

NAPOLEON AND BLUCHER. Illustrated. 8vo. Cloth, $1.00.

QUEEN HORTENSE. Illustrated. 8vo. Cloth, $1.00.

MARIE ANTOINETTE AND HER SON. Illustrated. 8vo. Cloth, $1.00.

PRINCE EUGENE AND HIS TIMES. Illustrated. 8vo. Cloth, $1.00.

THE DAUGHTER OF AN EMPRESS. Illustrated. 8vo. Cloth, $1.00.

JOSEPH II AND HIS COURT. Illustrated. 8vo. Cloth, $1.00.

FREDERICK THE GREAT AND HIS COURT. Illustrated. 8vo. Cloth, $1.00.

FREDERICK THE GREAT AND HIS FAMILY. Illustrated. 8vo. Cloth, $1.00.

BERLIN AND SANS-SOUCI. Illustrated. 8vo. Cloth, $1.00.

GOETHE AND SCHILLER. Illustrated. 8vo. Cloth, $1.00.

MERCHANT OF BERLIN and **MARIA THERESA AND HER FIREMAN.** 8vo. Cloth, $1.00.

LOUISA OF PRUSSIA AND HER TIMES. Illustrated. 8vo. Cloth, $1.00.

OLD FRITZ AND THE NEW ERA. Illustrated. 8vo. Cloth, $1.00.

ANDREAS HOFER. Illustrated. 8vo. Cloth, $1.00.

MOHAMMED ALI AND HIS HOUSE. Illustrated. 8vo. Cloth, $1.00.

HENRY VIII AND CATHERINE PARR. Illustrated. 8vo. Cloth, $1.00.

*** Bound complete in 6 volumes, sold by set only, $12.00.

New York: D. APPLETON & CO., 1, 3, & 5 Bond Street.